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Aristotle on Desire

GILES PEARSON

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Aristotle on Desire

Desire is a central concept in Aristotle's ethical and psychological works, but he does not provide us with a systematic treatment of the notion itself. This book reconstructs the account of desire latent in his various scattered remarks on the subject and analyses its role in his moral psychology. Topics include: the range of states that Aristotle counts as desires (*orexeis*); objects of desire (*orekta*) and the relation between desires and envisaging prospects; desire and the good; Aristotle's three species of desire: *epithumia* (pleasure-based desire), *thumos* (retaliatory desire), and *boulêsis* (good-based desire – in a narrower notion of 'good' than that which connects desire more generally to the good); Aristotle's division of desires into rational and non-rational; Aristotle and some current views on desire; and the role of desire in Aristotle's moral psychology. The book will be of relevance to anyone interested in Aristotle's ethics or psychology.

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ARISTOTLE ON DESIRE

GILES PEARSON



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PREFACE

This book is distant descendant of a Ph.D. I completed at Cambridge University in January 2004. The book bears only a superficial resemblance to the original thesis, however. Half of the chapters do not correspond to anything in the dissertation, and although the spirit and some of the organisation of the thesis is apparent in Part II, very few of the conclusions or the details in the argumentation have survived in that part either.

A number of people have greatly helped me at various points in writing this book. First, the scholars who supervised the initial Ph.D.: Gisela Striker, who inspired my interest in Aristotle's moral psychology, Robert Wardy and Malcolm Schofield, the latter skilfully guiding me through the last year or so and the tricky final stages. Second, the thesis examiners, who provided detailed and thought-provoking comments (both in discussion and in writing) on the Ph.D.: Sarah Broadie and Nick Denyer. Third, the initial readers for Cambridge University Press for their extensive written comments: David Sedley and Michael Reeve. Fourth, David Sedley once again for reading and commenting on the penultimate version. Fifth, a good number of other people who have either provided me with written comments on parts or sections of the material (whether directly in this form or in much earlier guises), or helped me through discussion on particular matters at various points: Harry Adamson, Peter Adamson, Arif Ahmed, David Charles, Angela Chew, Ursula Coope, Jimmy Doyle, Jessica Moss and Michael Pakaluk. I also received helpful feedback on material that fed into this book at certain points from audiences at Bristol, Oxford and UCL and thank them for their comments.

I have also received support from a number of different institutions along the way: St John's College, Cambridge; Christ's College, Cambridge; the AHRB; the AHRC; and Bristol University. In particular, I would like to thank the AHRC and Bristol University for

PREFACE

the financial support that allowed me to have research leave for the academic year 2009–10, enabling me finally to bring the project to fruition, and my colleagues in the Philosophy Department at Bristol for supporting my leave.

Finally, I would like to thank a number of people for their personal support over the years I have composed this book: my parents, the rest of my family and friends, and above all Olga Simakova. I would also like to thank my mother, Maureen Pearson, for compiling the Index locorum.

I have spent a fair bit of time thinking about Aristotle's views on desire and motivation over a number of years and my ideas have certainly transformed over this period. I cannot help but feel that if I spent another five or ten years thinking about the topic, I would be able to write a much better book still. But, in the words of my old supervisor Malcolm Schofield (and of course Shakespeare), 'that way madness lies'.

As we shall see, Aristotle thinks that desire extends far beyond bodily appetites – he includes rational motivations and even hopes and wishes as desires – but the statue on the cover of this book – a copy of Praxiteles' *Aphrodite* – provides a particularly poignant reminder of the power of bodily desire. The original statue (which is now lost) was acquired by the city of Knidos in the mid-fourth century BC and attracted so much attention that the city became famous on its account alone. Indeed, it appears to have driven some of those who first encountered it wild with desire: Pliny reports that a certain man was so 'seized by love' for the statue that one night he hid himself in the temple where it was housed and 'embraced' it, and that consequently 'a spot bears witness to his desire'.

ABBREVIATIONS

For works of Aristotle

‘†’ = dubious

<i>An. post.</i>	<i>Analytica posteriora</i>
<i>De an.</i>	<i>De anima</i>
<i>De motu an.</i>	<i>De motu animalium</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Ethica Eudemia</i>
<i>Gen. an.</i>	<i>De generatione animalium</i>
<i>Hist. an.</i>	<i>Historia animalium</i>
<i>Insomn.</i>	<i>De insomniis</i>
<i>Int.</i>	<i>De interpretatione</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>De memoria et reminiscentia</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	<i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>Part. an.</i>	<i>De partibus animalium</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
† <i>Pr.</i>	<i>Problemata</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Sens.</i>	<i>De sensu et sensibili</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somno et vigilia</i>
<i>Soph. el.</i>	<i>Sophistici elenchi</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topica</i>

INTRODUCTION

I. General remarks

This work is entitled *Aristotle on Desire*, rather than, say, *Aristotle's Account of Desire* or *Aristotle's Philosophy of Desire*. This is because, strictly speaking, Aristotle does not provide us with a specific worked-out account of desire. There is, for example, no text in the Aristotelian corpus, in the form in which it has been passed down to us, entitled *Peri Orexeôs*, *On Desire*.¹ The account I offer is, therefore, in part a piece of detective work. It involves piecing together Aristotle's views on desire from his various scattered remarks about the subject, in particular from his ethical and psychological works.

I should say why I think this task is a worthwhile one. First, I believe that many aspects of Aristotle's views about desire have either been misunderstood or received little or inadequate discussion. Although many commentators have provided interpretations of Aristotle's remarks about desire, frequently these interpretations are made in passing or at the service of understanding other parts of his thought.² Consequently, when the interpretations they have offered are put under close scrutiny, they often fail to portray Aristotle's views accurately. A second reason for undertaking this study, suggested by the first point, is the importance the concept of desire assumes in other key areas

¹ In *Sens.* 1, which refers to *De an.* as already completed (436b10), Aristotle lists desire as one of the attributes of animals that still needs to receive separate treatment (436a5–10), but no such treatment materialises in what follows, i.e. in the remainder of the corpus as it has come down to us (although we do find some germane discussion in *De motu an.*).

² There are exceptions, of course, as we shall see; but still Aristotle's views on desire have yet to receive the attention they deserve. This book attempts to remedy that to some extent.

of Aristotle's ethical and psychological thought. Desire seems either central or at least relevant to understanding his accounts of, for example, virtue, akrasia, choice (*prohairesis*), deliberation, voluntary action, moral education, and animal locomotion. It will therefore be important to get as clear an understanding as possible of Aristotle's views about desire, in so far as they may affect our interpretations of these other key aspects of his philosophy. Consequently, the results of my inquiry should be of interest to philosophers and classicists working on a variety of topics in Aristotle; and indeed to scholars concerned with the history of philosophy more generally, given the influence Aristotle's philosophy had on subsequent western thought. In addition, I believe that Aristotle's views about desire, especially in certain key areas, are of more than merely historical interest. Thus, a final motivation for considering Aristotle's ideas on this subject is provided by certain developments in contemporary philosophy, in particular the interest that the notion of desire has received in much contemporary work in ethics, the philosophy of action and the philosophy of mind. It has widely been thought that an understanding of desire is particularly important in so far as it is a state that sits between cognitive states, such as perception and thought, on the one hand, and action, on the other. This seems to make desire significant not only with respect to our understanding of how cognitive states can be translated into action, but also with respect to the mind-body relation itself, since desire, apparently a mental state, appears capable of issuing in physical output, i.e. action. Again, desire is significant in that it seems to be a state that we can share with non-rational animals, but which can have instances that are beyond the capabilities of such creatures (for example, the desire to buy a lottery ticket next Thursday). Furthermore, desire seems required to explain not only rational actions (for example, via choices), but also irrational actions, such as weak-willed behaviour. Indeed, desire seems significant for our understanding of the moral psychology of an agent more generally. Although discussing all the ways in which Aristotle's account may be of philosophical interest is beyond the scope of this book, I shall make a start in that direction in the last two chapters.

I should also say something about the general approach of this book. It is not my aim to provide a detailed analysis of all the texts in which Aristotle discusses desire (a large number, across many works of the corpus),³ as if my book were a compendium of the relevant passages with commentary. Although my argument will obviously involve close examination of particular passages, my approach is thematically organised, with chapters attempting to ascertain a specific aspect of Aristotle's view. Of course, with this approach there is a danger of attributing to Aristotle a more systematically worked-out view than he in fact had. But (a) I firmly believe that in general the texts reveal a fairly systematic, worked-out, account of desire, and (b) any respects in which this is not the case can be accommodated by being prepared to acknowledge tensions in the account, and not insisting that Aristotle must always have ironed out every aspect of his theory. Indeed, at several points in my account (e.g. [Chapters 4](#) and [7](#)), I allow that various texts indicate different notions of a key idea or perhaps a change or development in Aristotle's view. Thus, although my general aim is to attempt to reconstruct the theory that seems latent in Aristotle's remarks, I seek to do so while remaining sensitive to the fact that in certain places it may only exist in embryonic form.

An additional point about method is that I shall not, for the most part, be concerned with attempting to trace the origin of Aristotle's views about desire from ideas he may have been influenced by. In particular, Aristotle's tripartite division of desire (epithumia, thumos, boulêsis) obviously owes much to Plato's tripartite analysis of the soul as developed especially in Book 4 of the *Republic*, but although the relation of Aristotle's ideas to Plato's will crop up from time to time in the chapters that follow, for the most part I shall just focus on what Aristotle has to say about the various desires. This is not because I think that the question of the relation of Aristotle's account to his predecessors' views is an uninteresting one, but rather because to attempt to integrate such discussion into my book more systematically would have made it grow exponentially.

³ Although *NE*, *EE*, *De an.*, *De motu an.* and *Rh.* harbour the great majority of the key passages.

2. Aristotle's desire terminology and some terms I shall leave untranslated

Aristotle's various desire-terms have received a number of different translations, and this can prove confusing for Greekless readers consulting translations or books about Aristotle's views. My general strategy in this book will be to explain Aristotle's various desire-terms in this section and then for the most part leave these key terms untranslated in unitalicised transliterations. This will have the positive consequence of introducing the key terms as technical ones to be fully specified by subsequent analysis, without having potentially misleading translations that could possibly push the investigation in a false direction or cloud an interpretation that would otherwise have revealed itself. Of course, the terms in question standardly have well-established meanings in everyday Greek (I shall supply a range of them as examples below), but in a work such as this we are attempting to specify Aristotle's account in a more precise way. Aristotle is a philosopher who employs his terminology in specific, often technical, ways – and he sometimes even appears to introduce his own terminology to specify a given phenomenon, as is perhaps the case with his broadest term for desire, *orexis* (see [Chapter 1](#)) – and so general Greek usage of the terms in question is of limited relevance. Indeed, most translations attempt to capture Aristotle's usage of a particular term, rather than more general Greek usage, but it is the former that is precisely what this study is attempting to ascertain. The best translations of Aristotle's key terms should, therefore, be something that would emerge from this study, rather than something presupposed by it.

I shall now indicate some of the common translations of Aristotle's key desire-terms. As mentioned, I shall transliterate these words. Although it is usual practice to italicise transliterated words, I shall refrain from doing so with these key terms (and a few others mentioned below), not only because it would make the book appear unnecessarily abundant with italicised words, but also because it would then make it difficult to use italics for emphasis. **Orexis** is Aristotle's most general term for desire, and indeed *orexis* has often been translated by 'desire', and I shall have cause to so translate it on occasion in this book. Other translations that have

been employed are ‘appetite’ and ‘appetition’.⁴ I shall also use the plural, **orexeis**.⁵ Aristotle claims that orexis has three species: epithumia, thumos and boulêsis. We shall investigate what these desires pick out in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six. **Epithumia** is usually translated by ‘appetite’, but ‘desire’, ‘bodily desire’ and ‘wanting’ have also been used or suggested.⁶ Again, I shall also use the plural, **epithumiai**.⁷ Even with only two of Aristotle’s desire-terms mentioned, we can quickly see one instance in which the translations can prove confusing, since ‘appetite’ and ‘desire’ have been used both for orexis and for epithumia. As mentioned, I shall generally be employing transliterated Greek, but when I do translate the terms, I shall use ‘desire’ for orexis, and ‘appetite’ for epithumia. **Thumos** has been variously translated by, for example, ‘spirit’, ‘anger’, ‘temper’, ‘impulses of temper’, ‘passion’ and ‘emotion’.⁸ Each of these can seem appropriate at some points. Equally, although it may seem somewhat surprising to readers with Greek, Aristotle also employs the plural, **thumoi**, on some occasions,⁹ and it will prove useful for me to use it sometimes as well. As we shall see, thumos is closely associated with **orgê**, ‘anger’, a term I shall also leave untranslated in transliteration.¹⁰ Aristotle’s third species of orexis, **boulêsis**, is often translated by ‘wish’, but ‘volition’ and ‘rational wish’ have also been used.¹¹ As we shall see, ‘wish’ seems appropriate as a translation for ‘boulêsis’ only on certain occasions. Again, I shall also use the plural, **boulêseis**.¹²

⁴ By e.g. *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: e.g. *De an.* 3.9–11 *passim*), Freeland (1994: *passim*) and Bostock (2000: 34).

⁵ Aristotle employs this at e.g. *NE* 10.5.1175b30–31, *De an.* 1.5.411a28, 3.10.433b5, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a4.

⁶ E.g. ‘desire’: Bostock (2000: 34); ‘bodily desire’: Crisp (2000); ‘wanting’: Hamlyn (1993).

⁷ Aristotle uses this at e.g. *NE* 3.11.1118b8, 15, *De an.* 3.10.433b6, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a22, 1.11.1370a18.

⁸ E.g. ‘spirit’: Bostock (2000: 34); ‘anger’: Mele (1984: 140), *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: e.g. at *EE* 2.10); ‘temper’: Broadie and Rowe (2002); ‘impulses of temper’: Broadie (1991: 106); ‘passion’: Hamlyn (1993), Hutchinson (1986: 75), Mele (1984: 140), *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: e.g. *NE* 3.8), etc.; ‘emotion’: Irwin (1985), Sherman (1989: 65n.15).

⁹ E.g. *Rh.* 2.13.1390a11, *Hist. an.* 8.1.588a23, *Part. an.* 2.4.651a2, *†Pr.* 27.3.947b23, cf. *Rh.* 2.12.1389a10.

¹⁰ For more on *orgê*, see Chapter 5, n.2.

¹¹ E.g. ‘volition’: Kenny (1979: 13); ‘rational wish’: Urmson (1988: 40).

¹² Aristotle uses this at e.g. *NE* 10.8.1178a30, *Soph. el.* 12.172b36, 173a2, *Rh.* 2.2.1378b18, 2.12.1389a8.

Aristotle also refers to capacities or faculties of the soul which issue in these desires. These are formed with a neuter article (*to*) and the termination ‘-ikon’. Again, I shall often leave these terms (but not their articles) untranslated and unitalicised. So I shall refer to the **orektikon**, the desiderative capacity; the **epithumêtikon**, the appetitive capacity; and the **thumikon**, the spirited capacity.¹³ In the case of thumos, Aristotle sometimes also refers to the thumikon as the **thumoeides**.¹⁴ With respect to the capacity that issues in boulêseis, Aristotle does not refer, as one might expect, to the **boulêtikon**, but he does sometimes refer instead to the **logistikon**, the rational capacity, or the part that has reason.¹⁵ We shall investigate the sense in which boulêsis belongs to the logistikon in [Chapter 7](#).

Aristotle also has words for objects of desire, terms that pick out ‘the thing desired’ in a way corresponding to each kind of desire he recognises. These are generally formed with a neuter article and the termination ‘-on’. Again, I shall often leave these terms (but not their articles) untranslated. So I shall refer to the **orekton** (pl. **orekta**) the object of desire; the **epithumêton** (pl. **epithumêta**), the object of epithumia; and the **boulêton** (pl. **boulêta**), the object of boulêsis.¹⁶ I do not, however, find him using a term for the object of thumos.

Aristotle also uses verbal forms of his desires. These are sometimes awkward to translate. For example, in *NE* 3.12 Aristotle writes:

The temperate man *epithumei* for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (1119b16–18)

¹³ Orektikon: e.g. *De an.* 2.3.414a32, b1–2, 3.9.432b3, 3.10.433b10–11, *De motu an.* 6.701a1, *NE* 1.13.1102b30; epithumêtikon: e.g. *Top.* 2.7.113b2–4, 5.1.129a12–14, *De an.* 3.9.432b25–26, *NE* 1.13.1102b30, 3.12.1119b14–15; thumikon: e.g. *Top.* 5.1.129a12–15, *De an.* 3.9.432a25.

¹⁴ E.g. *Top.* 2.7.113a36–b1, 4.5.126a8–10. Aristotle is following Plato (e.g. *Republic* 4).

¹⁵ See e.g. *Top.* 4.5.126a13, *De an.* 3.9.432a25; cf. also *Rh.* 1.10.1369b7 (discussed in [Chapter 7](#) below). Again, Aristotle is following Plato (e.g. *Republic* 4).

¹⁶ Orekton: e.g. *De an.* 3.10.433a28, 433b11, *De motu an.* 6.700b24, *EE* 7.2.1235b25–27; epithumêton: *EE* 7.5.1239b26, *Metaph.* A.7.1072a27; *Rh.* 1.11.1371a3; boulêton: *NE* 3.4, *NE* 3.5.1113b3, *EE* 7.2.1235b26. Aristotle also uses *epithumêma* at *NE* 3.10.1118a13, 16, and *boulêma* at *NE* 9.6.1167b7.

As mentioned, the most common translation of *epithumia* is ‘appetite’. But English does not have a verbal form of ‘appetite’ with the right connotations.¹⁷ *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984) resorts to ‘crave’, in this instance, but that fails to reveal that this is the verbal form of the noun *epithumia* (which it translates as ‘appetite’). However, rather than proliferate untranslated words beyond all limits, in this case I have adopted the strategy of translating verbal forms of the desires with noun phrases. So, in my hands, the above lines become:

The temperate man has *epithumiai* (*epithumein*) for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (1119b16–18)

Nonetheless, when I translate verbal forms in this way, I shall, as here, always mark the verbal form (in the infinitive) in brackets, so that the reader can track when I am simply rendering a noun in the original or translating a verbal form with a noun phrase.

We can, then, summarise Aristotle’s key desire-terms that I shall leave untranslated as follows:

Desire	Capacity of desire	Object of desire
orexis (pl. orexeis)	orektikon	orekton (pl. orekta)
epithumia (pl. epithumiai)	epithumêtikon	epithumêton (pl. epithumêta)
thumos (pl. thumoi)	thumikon/thumoeides	
boulêsis (pl. boulêseis)	< logistikon >	boulêton (pl. boulêta)

I shall also leave a few other non-desire-terms untranslated and unitalicised throughout this book. First of these are **akrasia** (‘incontinence’, ‘lack of self-control’) and **enkrateia** (‘continence’, ‘self-control’). Again, these terms have been translated in different ways by different commentators, and it seems to me less confusing to stick to the Greek terms. I shall also form adjectives from these nouns: **akratic** and **enkritic**. Second, I shall often

¹⁷ ‘Appetite’ does exist (although it is rare), but it does not mean ‘to have an appetite for’, but ‘to create or whet the appetite in’; cf. *appetiser*.

leave **eudaimonia** (happiness, flourishing, well-being) untranslated for the same reason. Finally, for the same reason once again, I shall also leave **phantasia** ('imagination', 'appearance'), pl. **phantasiai**, and the object of phantasia, **phantasma** (imagining, representation), pl. **phantasmata**, untranslated. My understanding of Aristotle's notion of phantasia, at least in so far as I need it for this book, is explained in more detail in [Chapter 2](#), §2.

The translations that appear in this book are usually modified versions of those that are found in *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984). Two notable exceptions are that my translations of *De anima* are based on Hamlyn (1993), again with a number of modifications, and my translations of *De motu animalium* are based on Nussbaum (1978), with modifications. Where the reader encounters translations from these works, he or she should assume that they are based on those versions. On the few occasions where my translations are based on some other source, I shall mark that either in a footnote or at the point of translation.

3. The plan of this book

I shall now provide a brief map of this book to help orientate the reader. The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, I provide some general reflections about the range of states that Aristotle counts as orexeis; consider his basic understanding of objects of desire and the means through which agents grasp them; and examine the general connection that he thinks holds between orexis and the good. In [Chapter 1](#) I illustrate the range of states that Aristotle counts as orexeis by highlighting several dimensions to his usage of the term. Orexeis can be rational or non-rational (see below); can be for a variety of 'objects' ontologically speaking, e.g. actions, processes, states of affairs; can be occurrent psychological episodes, like feeling thirsty, or dispositional states, like a desire for health which may manifest itself in certain circumstances; can be emotionally felt states, as e.g. thirst or hunger can be, or calm passions, as e.g. a desire to learn something may be; and can range over action-prompting wants (e.g. a desire to get an

apple one sees on the other side of the room), hopes (e.g. that an athlete win a race) and wishes (e.g. that one is immortal).

In [Chapter 2](#) I consider Aristotle's basic understanding of objects of desire. As I see it, by 'object of desire' (orekton) he does not mean to refer to the action or state of affairs desired since, without further specification, these lack the evaluative dimension that he thinks requisite. Instead, in a particular case, the object of desire picks out the action or state of affairs desired under the guise of a general desirability feature (or a more specific manifestation of that feature). On my reading, Aristotle thinks that desires require envisaging prospects or at least counterfactual scenarios, and so I argue against one commentator's claim that Aristotle would allow that some behaviour can be explained in terms of desire without reference to prospects. I also argue that Aristotle thinks that in order to grasp a prospect or counterfactual scenario the animal must at least possess the capacity of phantasia, since even if perception can by itself grasp prospects (on one reading it can, on another it cannot), it can only do so by employing phantasia in a perceptual predication. Thus I resist the view that Aristotle would allow that creatures that only possess the capacity of perception can nonetheless possess the capacity of desire.

In [Chapter 3](#) I examine Aristotle's claim in *De an.* 3.10 that the general correlative object of orexis, the orekton, is 'the good or the apparent good'. Against some other interpretations, I argue that the context of Aristotle's discussion reveals that the 'apparent good' disjunct of this specification is required because creatures might be in error about what actually *is* good for them. 'Apparent good' thus refers to something appearing *as* good even if it is not in fact good. This might seem problematic: Aristotle's account of orexis is meant to apply to animal as well as human desire, and yet much of what he claims elsewhere suggests that he thinks that animals cannot desire things *as* good. I argue that the resolution to this problem is that Aristotle possesses two different notions of 'good', one which includes pleasure (and the object of the thymos), and one which does not, but instead picks out the object of boulêsis. Animals can desire things *as* good in the broad sense, since in this sense pleasure counts as a good, but it does not follow that they can desire things *as* good in the narrow sense, since to do

so may require rational capacities they lack. Aristotle sometimes claims that pleasure is an apparent good. I argue that this reveals that ‘apparent good’ does not signify ‘something that appears good, even though in fact it *is* not’, but rather ‘something that appears good, even though it *may* not in fact be good’. And I specify the kind of error that Aristotle has in mind.

In Part II, I turn to consider Aristotle’s classifications of desire. Aristotle sub-divides orexis along two axes; into the three species, epithumia, thumos and boulêsis; and into rational and non-rational orexeis. In [Chapters 4, 5 and 6](#) I investigate the correlative objects of Aristotle’s three species of orexis. Epithumia is orexis for the pleasant, but what range of pleasures can it aim at? I argue that in fact there are good textual grounds to think that Aristotle possesses two notions of epithumia. First, a narrow notion, in which it is connected to bodily pleasure, indeed, *specific kinds* of bodily pleasure, namely, those that are connected, whether directly or indirectly, to tactile pleasures that arise from ameliorating painful disruptive bodily states. Second, a broad notion, in which epithumia retains its connection to pleasure, but extends to include other kinds of bodily pleasures and also non-bodily pleasures besides, such as the pleasure of learning or victory. I close [Chapter 4](#) by examining two different senses in which an epithumia can ‘aim’ at some object. This distinction enables me to explain a sense in which epithumia can ‘aim’ at things besides pleasure (e.g. noble things) even though in each instance it involves desiring its object *as* pleasant.

In [Chapter 5](#) I consider thumos. I begin by examining the connection between thumos and orgê (‘anger’). I argue that Aristotle often uses thumos and orgê as synonyms, and even when orgê is not explicitly mentioned his usage of thumos is frequently so closely tied to his official account of orgê in the *Rhetoric*, or the physical account of orgê we find in *De anima*, that it seems most likely that he has orgê in mind. I then consider some putative broader significations of thumos and, in particular, examine a role Aristotle may assign to thumos in the virtue of courage. I argue that there is a sense in which courage could, in at least many instances, be assigned to the thumoeides; but not because acts issuing from thumos would *eo ipso* count as virtuous, but rather owing to the fact

that possessing the appropriate thumoi may well be a key ingredient in (at least many) courageous actions. Even in this context, however, Aristotle generally seems to have his *orgê* signification of thumos in mind. Finally, I assess the view, advocated by several commentators, that thumos holds some special connection to the noble or the fine (*to kalon*). I argue against Cooper's (1999a) suggestion that we should view the noble as a correlative object of thumos, parallel to the good for *boulêsis*, and pleasure for *epithumia*. Both *epithumia* and thumos can aim at the noble *de re* (and will do so in virtuous agents), but neither involves aiming at the noble *de dicto*. Nevertheless, one passage does provide justification for the view that there is *some* kind of inherent connection between thumos and the noble that is lacking in *epithumia*. But I argue that this is consistent with the fact that the noble is never a direct object of thumos.

In Chapter 6 I examine Aristotle's third and final species of *orexis*, *boulêsis*. Given Chapter 3's argument that Aristotle must think that the notion of good that picks out the *boulêton* is narrower than the notion of good that corresponds to the *orekton* in general (*boulêsis* is *orexis* of the good), the purpose of this chapter is to investigate what this narrow notion of good is. On the surface, it may pick out one specific kind of good or it may refer to a plurality of goods grouped in some way. For those who think that Aristotle intends to link *boulêsis* to a single good, the good generally proposed has been (the agent's conception of) *eudaimonia*. I consider several different versions of this view, which I group into 'reflective' accounts – if the agent's *boulêseis* are said to *reflect* his conception of *eudaimonia* – or 'referential' accounts – if the agent's *boulêseis* are said to make *direct reference* to his conception of *eudaimonia*. Ultimately, however, I conclude that each type of view is untenable. The problems that such accounts face instead point towards the notion that a plurality of goods can count as the object of *boulêsis*. Again, such views could be understood reflectively or referentially, but in fact I argue that a key objection to the reflective *eudaimonia*-based view counts decisively against every variety of reflective view, even one which appeals to a plurality of goods. Instead, a referential view that permits a plurality of goods (such as health, honour, power) to count as objects of *boulêsis*

emerges as a strong candidate for what Aristotle intends in linking *boulêsis* to the good. I also suggest that the feature he might think groups the plurality of ends that a *boulêsis* can aim at is that they are objects of serious human concern, when this is understood to pick out distinctively human ends.

In several passages Aristotle claims that *boulêsis* belongs to the rational part of the soul, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* belong to the non-rational part. In [Chapter 7](#) I investigate the basis of this division. I argue against several views: (i) that *boulêsis* is rational because each instance of it involves thought in its formation, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* do not; (ii) that *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they are tied to the body in a way that *boulêsis* is not; and (iii) that *boulêsis* is rational because it is in some way responsive to a judgement as to the appropriateness of the object desired, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they are not responsive in this way. Each of these views fails either because it is plausible that *boulêsis* would sometimes come out as non-rational on the proposed criterion, or because *epithumia* and *thumos* would sometimes come out as rational on that criterion. However, although the mere fact that a desire involves thoughts or reason in its formation does not make that desire rational, for Aristotle, the view that desires are rational if they involve *thinking* or *reasoning*, i.e. are consequent upon deliberation, does appear to have some textual support. Further examination reveals, however, that the end that the deliberation is performed with a view to is crucial for the desire's rational status, on Aristotle's account, and so the possibility arises that he would allow that some desires consequent upon deliberation would actually count as non-rational. In fact, I then show that even the notion that all rational desires are consequent upon deliberation does not fit certain key passages in Aristotle's ethical writings. Rather than give up on the idea that Aristotle would in these works consider every instance of *boulêsis* to be rational, I suggest instead that he might think that in fact the basic end of the desire is the only crucial factor in determining whether it is rational or not. In order for this view to be plausible, I argue, he must have in mind the base, correlative, objects of the species of desire, since it seems likely that he would allow that specific goals of *epithumia* or *thumos*

could have manifestations that are beyond the capacity of non-rational creatures.

In the third and final part of the book, in the light of the account of desire that has emerged, I provide some further reflections about Aristotle's broad and narrow notions of desire, and a discussion of his moral psychology. In [Chapter 8](#) I first address the charge that Aristotle's broad notion of desire is so broad as to be uninteresting. I argue that his notion of *orexis*, although it extends beyond action-prompting desires to hopes and wishes, still nonetheless serves to distinguish *orexis* from a variety of other psychological states. The charge of triviality that has been directed at such notions of desire is often aimed specifically at the idea that every action is motivated by a desire. But such a notion of desire does at least serve to distinguish intentional from unintentional action and, in any event, I argue that ultimately Aristotle does not think that the source of motivation is a desire *simpliciter*, but rather *the prospect of objects of desire*. This actually brings Aristotle's position in line with certain non-Humeans, like Nagel and Scanlon, who argue that the broad notion of desire is in some way insubstantial, and this, I argue, indicates that the broadness of the notion of desire in play was not actually at stake in that debate. Indeed, I note that Aristotle's view actually *improves* on these accounts in an important respect, whilst remaining non-Humean. I then turn to Aristotle's narrow notion of desire, and argue that his general picture of such kinds of desire also compares favourably with some modern ones. Aristotle does not have it all his own way, however, since in the final part of the chapter I sketch two problematic dimensions to his tripartite division of *orexis*, which together suggest that the specific way he divides up the *orekton* would need revising in order to be entirely palatable.

In the final chapter I consider some aspects of Aristotle's moral psychology that flow from considerations earlier in the book. The account of virtue that has emerged by this point is that the virtuous agent experiences the harmonious interplay of his rational and non-rational parts: in contrast to akratic and enkratic agents, his rational and non-rational motivations point in the same direction. But is this actually Aristotle's view? Is the virtuous agent really entirely unconflicted? And if he is, what mechanism could

possibly explain such a feature of his psychological makeup? I address these and related questions with respect to the key virtues of temperance and courage and, in so doing, provide extensive discussion of two rival readings of Aristotle's account of virtue: John McDowell's and David Charles'. On my account, when a virtuous agent recognises that a requirement demands a course of action, that does not itself entail that he will not be distressed at the prospect of acting that way (courage) or that he cannot recognise that it would be pleasurable to act in a contrary way (temperance). However, in spite of such impressions, courageous and temperate agents will remain unconflicted, or at least will only be *very slightly* conflicted. This occurs not because the virtuous agent's conception of his situation 'silences' any errant impulses, as McDowell thinks, but because the virtuous agent's non-rational part *harmonises* with his rational part. Although there is reason for him to undergo the evaluative impressions (with courage, for example, he is knowingly expecting to lose his life, and his life is valuable, hence he should be distressed by such a prospect or else be excessively *fearless*), these do not trigger significant errant inclinations in him, as befits his being able to act virtuously in an effective way. The harmony in question, I suggest, is brought about by the agent's upbringing, education and habituation, and other such similar features.

PART I

DESIRES AND OBJECTS OF DESIRE

CHAPTER I

THE RANGE OF STATES ARISTOTLE COUNTS AS DESIRES (OREXEIS)

Aristotle's broadest term for desire, the word which 'desire' translates in the title of this book, is orexis (pl. orexeis). In Part I of this book, I investigate orexis and its object (the orekton). In this chapter I highlight several dimensions to the range of states Aristotle counts as orexeis. In [Chapter 2](#) I consider Aristotle's basic understanding of objects of desire (orekta) and the means through which agents grasp them. Finally, in [Chapter 3](#) I consider the relation between orexis and the good.

I. Orexeis can be rational as well as non-rational

Given that, so far as we can tell, there is a general absence of its use before Aristotle, it has been suggested that he 'very probably invents' the term 'orexis' (and also 'orekton', the object of orexis, and 'orektikon', the desiderative element or capacity).¹ But why should Aristotle feel the need to introduce a new term? A clue is provided in *De anima* 3.9. Aristotle here announces (432a18–22) that he wishes to ascertain whether it is the whole soul that is responsible for animal locomotion or one part of it; and, if the latter, whether it is (a) one of the parts 'usually spoken of'; (b) one of the parts he has 'mentioned earlier' (i.e. in *De anima*); or (c) 'a special part' that exists in addition to these.² He provides various options for (a) and (b) in the passage that follows (432a22–432b7).

¹ Nussbaum (2001: 273–6). Plato does not employ the term (although it does appear in the Platonic Corpus in *Definitions* (414b7), but this work is not by Plato and is most likely late). Nussbaum suggests (2001: 273–4, and 486n.26) that a putative pre-Aristotelian usage, in an ethical fragment by Democritus (DK 68 B27, 219, 284), is a post-Aristotelian redaction (cf. Stewart (1958)). I shall refer to Nussbaum's interesting discussion of orexis at several points in what follows.

² Aristotle's subsequent discussion does not really address the possibility that the whole soul is responsible for animal movement – except negatively in so far as it does isolate a specific part.

Under (a), he refers to the parts included in two separate divisions of the soul: a tripartite division, seen in Plato's *Republic* Book 4, into a reasoning part (*logistikón*), a spirited part (*thumikón*), and an appetitive part (*epithumêtikón*); and a bipartite division, which he himself employs in *NE* 1.13, into a rational part (*to logon echon*) and a non-rational part (*to alogon*). Under (b), he mentions the nutritive part (*threptikón*; discussed in *De an.* 2.4), the perceptual part (*aisthêtikón*; *De an.* 2.5–3.2), and the part that issues in phantasia (*phantastikón*; *De an.* 3.3).³ Finally, at the end of the passage, he turns to the *orektikón*. As this part has not received systematic discussion in what has preceded, it is likely that Aristotle intends it to fall under (c).⁴ He claims that this part is distinct from all the others, both in definition and capacity, and notes:

it would surely be absurd to split this up; for in the rational part there will be *boulêsis*, and in the non-rational part *epithumia* and *thumos*; and if the soul is tripartite there will be *orexis* in each part. (432b4–b7, for terms I am leaving untranslated, see Introduction, §2)

For sure, Aristotle does not appear to be introducing the term 'orexis' for the first time in this chapter; he states facts about it, rather than explaining his new coinage, and indeed he has employed the division earlier in *De an.*, at 2.3.414b2.⁵ But in acknowledging that although *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational, while *boulêsis* is rational, *all three* (*epithumia*, *thumos*, *boulêsis*) are types of *orexis*, Aristotle indicates that he thinks that there is something in common between a distinctively rational response and two non-rational ones.⁶ Now Aristotle's accounts of his three species of *orexis*, and the rational/non-rational division within them, shall be explored in detail in subsequent chapters. But the point now is

³ Aristotle does not mention the thinking part (*noêtikón*; *De an.* 3.4–6), under (b), but presumably he takes it to be covered by the reasoning part mentioned in (a): when he comes to discuss the thinking part later on in 3.9 he introduces it as 'the reasoning part (*logistikón*) or what is called thought (*nous*)' (432b26). (Aristotle sometimes uses *nous* in a broad way, referring to all types of thinking (as here, and also at e.g. *De an.* 3.4.429a23); sometimes in a narrow sense, signifying something like 'understanding' (e.g. *De an.* 3.10.433a26).

⁴ Although it has been mentioned; e.g. at *De an.* 2.3.414b1–16, 3.7.431a8–17.

⁵ See also *De motu an.* 6.700b22, *EE* 2.7.1223a26–27, and esp. *EE* 2.10.1225b24–26.

⁶ Nussbaum suggests that this serves to 'demystify rational action by asking us to see it as similar to other animal motions', thereby making 'animals look less brutish, humans more animal' (2001: 276).

this: the *De an.* 3.9 passage indicates that Aristotle is struck by the fact that although *boulêsis* is rational, and *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational, they are all nonetheless parallel at some basic level of description: the *orektikon* includes all three and yet is distinct ‘in definition and capacity’ from all other capacities. This is quite striking, and if Aristotle did invent the term ‘*orexis*’, it was probably in large part to mark this fact.⁷

2. *Orexeis* have a variety of ‘objects’, ontologically speaking

But what makes it appropriate for Aristotle specifically to employ the term ‘*orexis*’ in this context? The noun is derived from the verb, found regularly enough, *oregein*; in the middle/passive form: *oregesthai*. The basic meaning of the verb in its active form is ‘reach (out)’, ‘stretch (out)’, ‘hold out’, ‘hand’, ‘give’, and in its middle/passive forms the related ‘stretch oneself out’, ‘stretch forth one’s hand’, ‘reach at/to [a thing]’, ‘grasp at’. However, at some point in Attic Greek the middle/passive form began to be employed in a metaphorical sense as well, applied to the internal, psychological, realm, signifying something like ‘yearn for’, ‘long for’.⁸ No doubt it would be this metaphorical extension of the verb that inclined Aristotle to invent, if invent he did, the corresponding noun, ‘*orexis*’, and employ it as his general term for desire. Martha Nussbaum points to two other features of the meaning of the verb that make it particularly appropriate in this context: (i) its basic meaning strongly suggests directedness towards some object – which, when transferred to the inner realm, points to our attention being directed at or focused on something; (ii) its signification is more active than passive, a ‘going after’, not an ‘expecting to come’. With this in mind, Nussbaum goes on to suggest that when Aristotle asserts that *epithumia*, *thumos* and *boulêsis* are each forms of *orexis*, he is claiming that these three states ‘are all

⁷ Cf. Aristotle’s introduction (if not invention) of *hupolêpsis* as the genus of which knowledge (*episteme*), belief (*doxa*), understanding (*phronêsis*), ‘and their opposites’, are species (*De an.* 3.3.427b24–26). Ordinary language does not always supply genus terms.

⁸ See LSJ s.v. II.2.b and Nussbaum (2001: 274 and 486n.30).

forms of object-directed, active inner reaching-out' (2001: 275), and given that Aristotle holds that orexis is involved in every case of voluntary animal movement (see e.g. *De an.* 3.9–10), she suggests that he must think 'this sort of reaching out is common to the movements of both human and other animals' (2001: 275). Thus, Nussbaum concludes, in contrast to both Plato's tripartite division (rational, spirited, appetitive) and also to the bipartite rational/non-rational division:

The contribution of Aristotle's innovation seems to be precisely that it does enable us to see and focus on what is common to all cases of animal movement, whereas the Platonist structure does not. Aristotle, by choosing this particular word, is saying that the single or common element which Plato fails to recognise is this element of reaching out for something in the world, grasping after some object in order to take it to oneself. Both human and other animals, in their rational and non-rational actions, have in common that they stretch forward, so to speak, towards pieces of the world which they then attain or appropriate. (2001: 275–6)

I think that Nussbaum is right to emphasise that all orexeis possess directedness, that is, are intentional states.⁹ And this no doubt helps explain why Aristotle found this word particularly appropriate in this context. But Nussbaum's characterisation of orexis as a reaching out for something in, or a piece of, the world so that one can take, attain, or appropriate it for oneself, is actually rather more restrictive than it should be. This characterisation will fit cases in which the creature is motivated to eat some food it encounters, for example, or grab hold of something valuable, such as money (cf. *NE* 7.4.1148a25), but orexis can extend more widely than such contexts. In addition to being for pieces of, or things in, the world in this way, orexeis can also, more simply, be for *processes*; whether *bodily*, as with sex or eating,¹⁰ or for *mental activities*, as with the pleasure of learning (e.g. *NE* 3.1.1111a31). Orexeis can also be for *states* or *conditions*, such as health (*NE* 3.1.1111a31, *NE* 3.3.1111b27–28) or honour (*NE* 7.4.1148a26);

⁹ I discuss (and reject) a putative counter-example to this view in [Chapter 2](#), §2.

¹⁰ For desires for sex, see e.g. *Hist. an.* 6.18.571b8–10, *NE* 7.3.1147a15, *EE* 3.2.1230b26–27; cf. *NE* 3.11.1118b11, and 3.8.1117a1–2: the epithumia of adulterers. Although desire for sexual intercourse might be said to involve 'reaching out for something in the world' (namely, the sexual partner), it sounds odd to say that it does so in order to 'attain' or 'appropriate' it. Nussbaum's characterisation seems even less appropriate with masturbation. For desires to eat, see [Chapter 4](#) below.

for *events*, such as victory (*NE* 7.4.1148a26); and for *states of affairs*, e.g. that one's wine does not go off (*NE* 8.2.1155b29–31), or 'to rule all mankind' (*EE* 2.10.1225b33–34). In fact, even Nussbaum's claim that orexeis are concerned with grasping after something *for oneself* needs to be qualified. For although this may hold in many cases, Aristotle also claims that one can have *boulêseis* for things that can in no way be brought about by one's own efforts, such as that a particular athlete or actor should win a competition (*NE* 3.2.1111b23–24, cf. *EE* 2.10.1225b35–36), and the objects of such desires are not, or at least not naturally, construed as something one wishes to 'take', 'appropriate', or 'attain' *for oneself*. The notion of seeking to 'attain [something] for oneself', for instance, more naturally fits the idea of one's striving to do or get something, just as would most likely be the case if one were in the competition oneself.

3. Orexeis can be dispositional as well as occurrent

Another dimension to the range of states Aristotle counts as orexeis is that they can plausibly be dispositional, not merely occurrent. Occurrent desires refer to a specific incident, event, or process, that is, actually undergoing an urge to go somewhere, eat something, smoke, have sex, for instance. Whether or not such an impulse is one we act on, it is a specific event we undergo, a discrete episode we experience at some specific juncture. Now, besides occurrent states, we also apply the concept 'desire' to certain dispositional states. Suppose Noel desires to form a relationship with Amber. We do not generally think that, in order to have this desire, Noel must be constantly undergoing a specific occurrent episode directed at such a state of affairs. When he is playing cricket or buying corned beef for his sandwiches (or, indeed, when he is asleep), he need not be undergoing occurrent outbursts of the desire. But Gilly and Luke, who are gossiping about Noel while he is running between the wickets, still seem able to say, truly, that he desires to form a relationship with Amber.

I believe that Aristotle would also allow that orexeis can be dispositional as well as occurrent. First, and most simply, many

of his examples of orexeis would quite naturally be construed as dispositional. He recognises that we can have a boulêsis for health or for flourishing in life (*eudaimonia*) (*NE* 3.3.1111b27–28), and he writes of epithumiai for learning, wealth, gain, victory, honour and (again) health (see *NE* 3.1.1111a31, 7.4.1148a25–26). It is surely more likely that he is referring to dispositional states in these instances: we can presumably say, for example, that Noel desires to flourish in life even though just now he is concentrating on running between the wickets; or that an army general desires to be victorious against his enemy, even though at this particular point of time he is asleep.

Besides Aristotle's examples, there are further considerations that suggest he would allow that orexeis can be dispositional as well as occurrent. Aristotle thinks that when someone has decided to do something he desires in accordance with the deliberation (*NE* 3.2.1113a11–12,¹¹ *EE* 2.10.1226b16, 19–20). But it seems highly unlikely that he thinks that each time an agent chooses to do something he must keep that choice in mind, as one continuous occurrent emotional episode, until he either acts on that choice, or else gives it up. Someone might desire to be healthy and, after deliberation, choose to go jogging, eat more greens and give up smoking. But surely such an agent need not – indeed cannot – keep all these things constantly in his mind, and presumably that would not be deemed necessary, on Aristotle's view, for us to say that he has chosen to do the things that he thinks will lead to his achieving a healthy state.¹² Another passage that strongly supports the idea that Aristotle would allow dispositional orexeis occurs in his account of friendship, when he discusses unanimity or like-mindedness (*homonoia*). He claims that such unanimity is found among good men since they are unanimous both within themselves and with one another, being, so to speak, of one mind, and he adds the following explanation:

¹¹ Reading *kata tēn boulesin*.

¹² Indeed, Aristotle claims that some akratic agents can deliberate with a view to their akratic ends (*NE* 6.9.1142b18–20), ends which conflict with their choices. The motivation involved in these agents' choices will most naturally be understood as dispositional at various points during this process. But see the next note for *akrasia* in general.

for the *boulêseis* (*boulêmata*) of such men are lasting (*menein*: are constant, stay put) and not at the mercy of opposing currents like a strait of the sea, and they have *boulêseis* (*boulesthai*) for what is just and what is advantageous, and these are the objects of their common endeavour as well. (*NE* 9.6.1167b6–9)

A desire that is lasting or stays put seems to be dispositional and not something that just pulls at us in one instant, like a sea current, and then subsides.¹³

4. Orexeis can be ‘calm’ as well as ‘violent’

Orexeis also plausibly range over what Hume called ‘calm’ as well as what he called ‘violent’ passions. In common parlance, ‘desire’ can sometimes seem synonymous with ‘appetite’, and be thought to refer to intensely felt, ‘violent’, emotional states (usually occurrent) that we are ‘in the grip of’ or ‘driven by’. Think of desires for food or drink, if one is hungry or thirsty, sexual desires, or a desire to smoke if one has just given up. Such desires often seem extremely powerful and demand our conscious attention. Orexis is certainly intended to cover such states. Aristotle thinks that desires for bodily appetites, such as sexual desire, or desires for food and drink (*NE* 7.3.1147a15, 3.11.1118b8–10) often involve pain (*NE* 3.11.1119a4). And by this he surely means that such states are frequently felt emotionally and uncomfortable until satisfied.¹⁴

As examples of ‘calm’ passions, Hume mentioned ‘benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children’ and ‘the

¹³ Desires bound up with general cases of *akrasia* may also naturally be understood as dispositional: the *akratic* has two conflicting desires (see e.g. *NE* 1.13.1102b21) and, at the point of action, the rational one (which he fails to follow) may naturally be understood as reverting to a dispositional state, while the appetitive one dominates in an occurrent outburst. Aristotle’s characterisation of the *akratic* as having knowledge, but not currently exercising it (*NE* 7.3.1146b33–34), and his claim that it would be ‘strange’ (*deinon*) to think that when an agent acts *akratically*, he goes against some knowledge he is *actually employing* (*NE* 7.3.1146b35), may suggest he held such a view. However, as is well known, several commentators have tried to read such passages as consistent with ‘clear-sighted’ *akrasia*, which in this context would permit *akrasia* to involve two conflicting *occurrent* desires (see e.g. Broadie (1991: Ch. 5, 2002: 385–99); Charles (1984: Chs. 3–4, 2009); and contrast e.g. Price (2006)).

¹⁴ See also *EE* 2.8.1225a20–33, and Chapter 4, §1 below. Also note *De an.* 1.1, where Aristotle’s ‘material account’ of anger (*orgê*), ‘a boiling of the blood and hot stuff round the heart’ (403a30–403b1), naturally suggests felt phenomenological effects.

general appetite to good, and aversion to evil consider'd merely as such' (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.3.417). Now although Aristotle would probably hold that some of these are more sensibly characterised as states (*hexeis*), rather than passions (*pathê*), benevolence and kindness, for example, he would also allow that desires can be 'calm'. This rubric will obviously apply to many of the desires Aristotle characterises as 'rational',¹⁵ but I think he would also allow that non-rational desires could sometimes fit this characterisation as well. For, besides bodily pleasures, Aristotle also recognises 'pleasures of the soul', such as love of learning or honour (*NE* 3.10.1117b28–29), and in *NE* 3.1 he claims we can have epithumiai for such things, e.g. for learning and health (1111a31) (for more discussion, see [Chapter 4](#), §2). As pleasure-based epithumiai, these could still be intended to count as non-rational desires (see [Chapter 7](#) below), but it would not seem likely that Aristotle envisaged them as, or at least *always* as, emotionally intense, felt, states, which involve, as Hume put it, 'an immediate feeling or sensation'.

5. Orexeis range over wants, hopes and idle wishes

In order to bring out the final aspect I wish to highlight about the range of states that Aristotle includes as orexeis, it will prove helpful to contrast his account of orexis with a modern account of 'wanting'. Elizabeth Anscombe claims that 'the primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*'. On her view, there are two features present in wanting: 'movement towards a thing and knowledge (or at least opinion) that the thing is there' (1957: 68).¹⁶ To account for cases in which one knows the thing does not currently exist, Anscombe alters the account slightly: 'some kind of action or movement which (the agent at least supposes) is of use towards something, and the idea (rather than knowledge or opinion) of that thing' (1957: 70). Anscombe thus ties 'wanting' to intention and

¹⁵ Indeed Hume thinks that the existence of calm desires partly *explains* why philosophers have mistakenly thought there can be motivations that stem from reason alone. I investigate Aristotle's non-Humean account of motivation in my 2011a.

¹⁶ This kind of analysis will require adjustment for animal desire if one accepts that animals do not have beliefs. See [Chapter 2](#) below and esp. Pearson (2011a: §1).

action whether or not the object exists: 'the wanting that interests us ... cannot be said to exist in a man who does nothing towards getting what he wants' (1957: 67–8).

One question that needs to be raised about Anscombe's account is what she counts as 'action or movement' and 'trying to get'. Prime instances would presumably be cases in which the creature attempts to get to the desired object by physical movement. She considers the example of a dog smelling a piece of meat lying on the other side of the door, and suggests the dog's 'trying to get' the meat will be his 'scratching violently round the edges of the door and snuffling along the bottom of it and so on' (1957: 68). But Anscombe evidently intends 'doing something towards' to extend beyond this sort of case. She claims that the same features of wanting (movement towards, knowledge/opinion/idea of the thing) are present in human action, even though this is, as she puts it, 'a great deal more complicated' (1957: 69). As an example, she refers, without further elaboration, to a desire to marry a particular woman. Presumably 'movement towards' in such a case needs to be understood more generally, as something like *taking steps towards getting* the 'thing' in question, since achieving a contract of marriage with a specific woman will typically require more than simply getting within her spatial proximity and doing something analogous to eating the meat!¹⁷ Another example Anscombe provides reveals the metaphorical extension of 'movement towards' even more clearly. She claims that 'resting' or 'lying on my bed' can be answers to the question: 'What are you doing?' (1957: 80). But if *inactivity* can count as 'doing something' then 'action or movement towards a thing' would simply pick out whatever it is that could be deemed to be a way to 'get', 'achieve' or 'secure' the thing wanted (or serve as a means to doing so), just as lying on one's bed may be a way of achieving one's goal of resting (see 1957: 79). Equally, presumably purely mental operations could count as 'actions' in this sense; as, say, when one tries to work out

¹⁷ 'Typically' because this kind of analysis might hold as a characterisation of someone who has been 'wooing' the woman in question for some period of time, and now just needs to propose (where 'proffering the ring', or some such, might replace 'eating the meat'). Anscombe also attempts to provide an account of wants that do not have specific objects (e.g. 'I want a wife') that is consonant with her general account (1957: 69–70).

if 79 is a prime number, and ‘takes steps’ to do so by seeing if 79 divides by 3, 7, 11, and so on.

An additional feature of Anscombe’s account is her attempt to distinguish the ‘wanting’ which is tied to intention and action (in the broad sense of ‘action’ specified above) from some other uses of ‘wanting’ and from what she calls ‘idle wishing’. ‘Wanting’, she suggests, may also be applied to the ‘prick of desire at the thought or sight of an object, even though a man then does nothing towards getting the object’ (1957: 67). She does not provide an example, but perhaps seeing some candyfloss at a fair, feeling the ‘prick of desire’, and involuntarily exclaiming ‘I want some!’, might be an example, if one then quickly recovers oneself and does nothing towards getting any. Another type of case Anscombe considers is when an object arouses some feelings of longing in some future state of affairs, of which there is at least some prospect, even though this does not entail ‘trying to get’. She suggests that such longing may also be called ‘wanting’ if it is sustained, but may veer off more into idle wishing (see below) the less likely the prospect is envisaged to be. This kind of ‘wanting’, she claims, can be characterised as *hope*. Again, she does not provide an example, but instances would presumably include wanting a certain football team to win the league or a trophy, wanting an artist to win the Turner prize, etc. Anscombe also mentions a ‘degenerate’ kind of hope, in which what one hopes will happen *is* within one’s power to try to bring about, but one nevertheless does nothing to bring it about. The first notion of hope incorporated the realisation that it was out of one’s power to do anything towards bringing about the prospect in question, and so hoping was in effect one’s only option, but with the degenerate kind of hope the idea seems instead to be: ‘I hope that it will happen *without* my doing anything towards it (even though I could do something)’. Those who are lazy might, I suppose, be prone to such ‘degenerate’ hopes. Besides these uses of ‘wanting’ and ‘hope’ – where it need not be true that the agent does something towards getting the thing desired – Anscombe also considers ‘idle wishes’. The chief mark of an ‘idle wish’, she suggests, is that ‘a man does nothing – whether he could or no – towards the fulfilment of the wish’ (1957: 67). The primitive expression of such wishing, she claims, is, for example, ‘Ah, if

only ...!' – 'if only $\sqrt{2}$ were commensurable ... or Helen were still alive ... or I were a millionaire' (1957: 67).¹⁸

Now return to Aristotle. I have already mentioned Nussbaum's view that Aristotle's employment of the term 'orexis' enables us 'to see and focus on what is common to all cases of animal movement' (2001: 275). In fact, Nussbaum appears to think that the link to movement is constitutive of Aristotle's understanding of orexis: 'if movement does not follow', she suggests, 'and we cannot produce any impediment to explain the failure, we will be more likely to withdraw our orexis-ascription than to regard it as a counter-example to an empirical thesis about the causes of action' (2001: 278). This tie to movement, she claims, seems to be part of 'what it *means* to have an orexis for something, about the conditions under which we are logically entitled to say of an animal that it has an orexis for something' (2001: 278).

It is of course true that *De an.* 3.9–10 identifies the orektikon as the capacity of us in virtue of which we are moved¹⁹ and that *De motu animalium* identifies orexis as the 'proximate reason' (*eschatê aitia*) for movement (7.701a34–35). But Nussbaum seems to move from the fact that Aristotle holds that each case of animal self-movement involves an orexis to the claim, which evidently does not follow, that it is part of what it means to have an orexis that any orexis is directed at triggering movement.²⁰ That Aristotle

¹⁸ Another set of cases in which 'want' appears not to entail trying to get is with conflicting wants. An agent might possess two conflicting desires, each of which, in the absence of the other, would have the link to action that Anscombe specifies, but which fails to do so in the company of the other. Such a want may remain impotent unless the conflict is resolved in its favour and the other want given up. (Since either of the conflicting wants potentially has the connection to action that Anscombe mentions, it seems more appropriate to say that we have conflicting wants – in the primary sense of 'want' – not a wish versus a want, or a hope versus a want.) This would be relevant for Aristotle, since akrasia and enkrateia are both obviously cases in which we have conflicting wants.

¹⁹ See *De an.* 3.10.433a31–433b1, 433b10–11, 433b16–17, 433b27–28. In spite of Richardson's (1992) arguments to the contrary, I think it is clear that Aristotle wishes to assert that the orektikon is the capacity in virtue of which we are moved to voluntary action, as the above passages more than abundantly illustrate. I argue that this is not inconsistent with giving central place to Aristotle's claim that the orekton is what 'first of all' moves us (*De an.* 3.10.433b10–11, 433a27–28; cf. also 433a18–20) in my MS 'Aristotle on the Source of Locomotion in *De anima*'.

²⁰ Also, although locomotion (and indeed action in the broad sense) is tied to a desire, the way in which it is so needs careful formulation. I discuss this further in Chapter 8 below; see also Pearson (2011a).

does not hold the latter is suggested even by *De an.* 3.9–10. As we have seen (§1), Aristotle there begins by raising the question of what capacity it is in the animal that is responsible for locomotion. He then characterises various capacities of the soul, ending with the *orektikon*, which he insists is distinct in definition and capacity from all the other capacities. Only then does he proceed, in the remainder of 3.9 and 3.10, *to argue to* the conclusion that the *orektikon* is the capacity in virtue of which we are moved to intentional action.²¹ The fact that this required argument suggests that the connection between *orexis* and movement cannot be part of what it *means* to have an *orexis* for something, as Nussbaum suggests, since otherwise the investigation would be over before it began as a mere point of semantics. And the fact that the *orektikon* is deemed distinct in definition and capacity *even before* Aristotle argues that it should be identified as responsible for animal locomotion points in the same direction.

What does Aristotle mean by movement in this context? In *De an.* 3.9 he claims that he is looking for the capacity in animals in virtue of which they achieve ‘movement in respect of place’ (*kinêsis kata topon*: 432a17, 432b8, 13, etc.) or the ‘movement involved in travelling’ (*poreutikê*: 432b14). And in *De motu an.*, even though he states that his goal is to consider ‘in general the common reason for moving with any movement whatever’, he then immediately adds: ‘for some animals move by flying, some by swimming, some by stepping, some in other comparable ways’ (1.698a4–7). So ‘movement’, in this context, would seem to pick out animal locomotion, that is, the animal relocating from locality *A* to locality *B*. This suggests that not just any kind of activity that the creature may engage in would count as such. And that thought seems to be confirmed by *Historia animalium*, since Aristotle there refers to eating, for example, as an activity that is *distinct from* locomotion (the latter being said to take place through feet, wings, or organs that correspond to these) (1.4.489a26–29).

²¹ Aristotle’s view seems to be that all the other senses besides touch and taste are bound up with locomotion, and belong only to those animals that have this capacity (*De an.* 3.12.434b22–27).

But there is of course no reason to think that Aristotle holds that satisfying a desire must always involve relocation, even in non-rational animals. The creature might just happen to be located next to a source of food or drink and so not need to *relocate*. Indeed, even if the creature is not next to some source of food, it might not have to relocate to get some. Aristotle tells us that when female crows are sitting on their eggs waiting for them to hatch, the male bird will bring her food (*Hist. an.* 6.8.564a15–18). In fact, Aristotle appears to think that it could even be the case that for a creature to satisfy its desire it not only need not relocate, but must actually keep perfectly still. Famously, he writes:

When the crocodile yawns, the trochilus flies into his mouth and cleans his teeth. The trochilus gets his food thereby, and the crocodile, perceiving that it is being benefited, does not harm it; but, when it wants it to go, it shakes its neck, lest it should bite the bird. (*Hist. an.* 9.6.612a20–24)

Aristotle's claim about crocodiles is usually thought to be a popular myth, first found in Herodotus (Aristotle himself attributes the observation to Herodotus at *EE* 7.2.1236b9–10). In fact, such a cleaning process is fairly common with fish and shrimp.²² But from our perspective it is interesting that in order to describe this case Aristotle would have to say that it seems that the crocodile wants the bird to keep cleaning its teeth, and therefore concentrates on not causing it any harm. Evidently, then, 'trying to get', in this case, would actually amount to keeping still while the bird cleans/feeds, with 'gentle shaking' only required if it wants the bird to stop.

The reason satisfying a desire does not always require locomotion can be clearly seen if one considers *why* animals do relocate when they do so. The locomotion an animal engages in is usually directed at bringing about some other, primarily qualitative, change in it; it is not normally the object of desire itself (as would be the case, for example, if the object of desire was simply the pleasure of going for a walk or swim). When a creature moves towards some food or liquid, it does not simply wish to relocate itself into the spatial proximity of the food or drink, it wishes to

²² See Travers (1971) for discussion.

eat or drink it in order to gain the pleasure of doing so, which is some kind of qualitative change (this is even clearer with sexual desire; see *Hist. an.* 6.18.571b8–10). Thus desires are not generally directed at locomotion per se: locomotion will just be a means of bringing about the object of desire in many cases. Hence it can drop out of the picture if it is not required. And even when movement is required for the animal to bring about such an object of desire, standardly the movement in question is not itself what the desire aims at.²³

If we next turn to human orexeis, the fact that such orexeis are not all directed at locomotion is clearer still. Purposive human behaviour can obviously be highly complicated and so the ‘trying to get’ that is built into many human desires is often not naturally going to be understood in simple locomotive terms. That this is true of Aristotle’s account as well should be clear if we consider some of the states he thinks that desires can be *for* that I mentioned in §2 above. ‘Trying to get’ health, for example, *might* involve physical movement – exercise – but it might also involve planning to avoid certain foods, and selecting others, and then making corresponding requests to whoever it is that happens to be going to the shop that day; or perhaps ‘acting’ on the desire for health might involve trying to *get well*, and hence, if one is sick, this may involve resting. Equally, ‘trying to get’ the pleasure of learning may involve reading or writing books, or conversing with someone. Seeking victory in war would no doubt require physical locomotion, but ‘taking steps’ to get victory might also involve thinking through the strategy, and discussing tactics with others. Again, Aristotle states that the pleasure that arises from contemplation might motivate us to do it all the more (*NE* 7.12.1153a22–23). Such a desire is evidently not tied to locomotion.²⁴ In general, then, desires can

²³ Lorenz (2006: Ch. 10) also appeals to *De an.* 2.3 to defend the claim that desire is not essentially tied to locomotion (see 414b1–6, 14–16 with 415a6–7), but I think that the implications of Aristotle’s claims in this chapter are not transparent, as I discuss in Chapter 2, §4, below.

²⁴ Also, clearly the desire that the akratic or enkratic agent *fails* to act on (a rational desire in the former, a non-rational desire in the latter) will fail to bring about movement. Nussbaum claimed that if movement does not follow and we cannot ‘produce any impediment to explain the failure’, we will be more likely ‘to withdraw our orexis-ascription than to regard it as a counter-example’ (2001: 278), and so perhaps she would view the other desire (i.e. the one the akratic or enkratic does act in accordance with)

motivate us to move, relocate, get something, perform some activity, whether physical or mental, take steps to achieve some state or condition, bring about some event, and so on. Given this diversity, and the range of activities that could naturally be thought to count as taking steps towards satisfying such desires, it will prove much more sensible to characterise the desires that can motivate us, for Aristotle, in the way sketched in the discussion of Anscombe at the beginning of this section. On this view, ‘action or movement towards a thing’ is understood very broadly as simply picking out anything that could sensibly be deemed a way to ‘get’, ‘achieve’ or ‘secure’ the thing wanted (or serve as a means to doing so). This is intended in a suitably broad way, so that lying on a bed would count as a way of ‘getting’ rest, and focusing one’s mind would count as way of achieving the state of contemplation.

In addition, although all the characterisations of *orexeis* we have provided so far seem to fit Anscombe’s primary notion of ‘wanting’, connected to intention and action in the broad sense specified, it is important to realise that Aristotle’s notion of *orexis* extends beyond this, and includes some of the other states Anscombe mentioned, such as wanting in the form of hoping, and idle wishing. This can be seen by considering some of Aristotle’s examples of *boulêseis*, several of which have already been mentioned. Aristotle claims that we can have *boulêseis* for things that can in no way be brought about by our own efforts, such as that a particular athlete or actor should win a competition (*NE* 3.2.1111b23–24, cf. *EE* 2.10.1225b35–36). These look like good examples of the kind of wants Anscombe calls ‘hopes’, in so far as they might count as feelings of longing concerning some future state of affairs, of which there is at least some prospect, but which, unlike with degenerate hopes, I cannot myself do anything about. Again, Aristotle claims that we can have *boulêseis* for impossible things (*adunata*), such as, to rule all mankind, or to be immortal (*NE* 3.2.1111b22–23, *EE* 2.10.1225b32–34). These look closer to Anscombe’s ‘idle wishes’ in so far as although Aristotle contends that we can have *boulêseis*

as counting as an ‘impediment’ that explains the ‘failure’ of the desire in question to move us. But this would still seem quite a difficult case for her since there is no *external* impediment preventing the agent from acting on that desire.

for these things he also asserts that no one would choose to do such impossible things ‘unless ignorant of the impossibility’ (*EE* 2.10.1225b34–35), and if anyone does claim to have chosen them we would think them ‘silly’ (*NE* 3.2.1111b20–22). Such orexeis would, that is, naturally be expressed with Anscombe’s formulation for idle wishes: ‘If only ...!’

Orexis, then, seems to cover both wanting in Anscombe’s primary sense, connected to intention and action in the broad sense specified, and also wanting in the sense of hoping and idle wishes. This makes it a very broad state, much broader than Nussbaum’s characterisation suggests. When I translate ‘orexis’ in what follows, I shall employ ‘desire’, but I intend by this a state that covers wants, hopes and wishes, in Anscombe’s senses of these expressions. Orexis and ‘desire’, as I shall use it, range over: (i) psychological states that are directed at actions, which I shall sometimes refer to as ‘action-prompting desires’; (ii) states in which we have something invested in a state of affairs, even though we cannot do anything about it ourselves (i.e. hopes); and (iii) states which are more of the status of an idle wish or a whim.

Conclusion

Orexeis can be rational or non-rational; can have a variety of objects, ontologically speaking; can manifest themselves as occurrent psychological episodes or dispositional states; can be ‘violent’ or ‘calm’; and can range over wants, hopes and wishes. Given this diversity, one might not unreasonably wonder what Aristotle thinks all such states have in common that makes him want to call them by this one name. I shall return to this question in [Chapter 3](#), when I shall argue that a key respect in which Aristotle wants to group his three desires is that at some basic level they can all be considered to be directed at (a very broad notion of) the good or value.

CHAPTER 2

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT OBJECTS OF DESIRE (OREKTA) FOR ARISTOTLE

We have already seen that Aristotle's generic term for desire is 'orexis', and that orexis divides into epithumia, thumos and boulêsis. We have also noted that Aristotle has terms for the capacities of the soul that issue in such states – the orektikon, the epithumêtikon, the thumikon (or thumoeides) and the logistikon – and for most of their objects – the orekton, the epithumêton and the boulêton.¹ Now, in fact, Aristotle thinks that this three-part structure – capacity (*dunamis*), activity or action (*energeia* or *praxis*), and correlative object (*antikeimenon*) – is a general feature of what we might call 'psuchic' states, that is, states that are picked out as pertaining to the *psuchê* or soul.² And he thinks that there is a certain definitional priority of objects over activities and of activities over capacities:

Anyone who is going to engage in inquiry about these [*sc.* capacities of the soul] must grasp what each of them is and then proceed to investigate what follows and the rest. But if we must say what each of them is, e.g. what is the capacity of thought (*noêtikon*) or of perception (*aisthêtikon*) or of nutrition (*threptikon*), we must again first say what thinking and perceiving are; for activities (*energeiai*) and actions (*praxeis*) are in respect of definition prior to their potentialities (*dunameis*). And if this is so, and if again, prior to them, we should have considered their correlative objects (*antikeimena*), then we should for the same reason determine first about

¹ See Introduction, §2, above, for some references and in general for the terminology that will remain untranslated and unitalicised. As noted there, Aristotle does not appear to have a general term for the object of thumos, but it does nonetheless have a typical object, as we shall see in Chapter 5 below.

² We cannot say 'mental' states, since one such state is the nutritive capacity. In general, such states belong only to things that count as being alive, but this includes plants (which possess *only* the nutritive capacity). We could, as e.g. Irwin (1988: 332) does, refer instead to 'psychic' states or faculties, but this might make Aristotle's account appear concerned with premonition, pre-cognition, etc. when of course it is not. For related reasons, 'soul' is not a particularly happy translation of *psuchê* (see e.g. Wilkes (1992) and Pearson (forthcoming(b): Introduction)), although I shall still use it on occasion.

them, e.g. about nourishment (*trophê*) and the object of perception (*aisthêton*) and the object of thought (*noêton*). (*De an.* 2.4.415a14–22)

Aristotle does not here explain *why* he thinks that objects are prior to activities in respect of definition, and activities prior to capacities in respect of definition, but that is not important for our purposes.³ Important for us is the notion that in order to grasp what is essential to a capacity, we should first investigate its object (although the *orektikon* is not mentioned in the passage above, it was included in the list of capacities at *De an.* 2.3.414a31–32). In this chapter I shall provide some general considerations about Aristotle's understanding of objects of desire. Then, in [Chapter 3](#), I shall consider his specification of the *orekton* as the good or apparent good.⁴

1. What are objects of desire?

As we shall see in subsequent chapters, all the general objects of desire that Aristotle specifies are evaluative in nature. The *orekton* is the good (or apparent good), the *epithumêton* is pleasure, the object of *thumos* is most often characterised as revenge or retaliation (*timôria*), and the *boulêton* is also said to be the good. Given that objects of desire are evaluative in this way, it is clear that they will not standardly be specifiable simply as the actions or states of affairs that we desire. This is because the basic description of the act or state of affairs we desire, simply as such, does not reveal the evaluative respect under which it is viewed and so considered desirable. If we desire to go for a walk or to win the lottery, the act of walking or the state of affairs in which we win the lottery is not, without further specification, an object of desire, for Aristotle, since so described the examples lack the requisite evaluative dimension. Thus when Aristotle refers to *epithumiai* for food, drink or sex, or *epithumiai* for particular kinds of food, drink or sex (*NE* 3.11.1118b8–27), or when he refers to *boulêseis* for

³ A variety of senses in which actuality is prior to potentiality are provided in *Metaph.* Θ.8.

⁴ Equally, when I consider Aristotle's species of *orexis* in [Part II](#), this can also be thought of as attempting to delineate the specific evaluative objects of these kinds of *orexis*.

a certain actor or athlete to win a contest (*NE* 3.2.1111b23–24), he is not, strictly speaking, specifying an object of desire, since ancient Greek equivalents of eating caviar, drinking claret, Robert De Niro winning an Oscar or Usain Bolt winning a 100 metre race again lack the required evaluative dimension. Such descriptions of the acts or states of affairs desired do not reveal what is seen as valuable or good about them.

For the same reason, objects of desire are not normally going to be captured in desire-contents, if those are taken to be what serve as complements of the propositional attitude, desire. This is because it often seems that the contents of our desires are just the actions we desire or the state of affairs we wish or hope to come about, not the respect in which we see so acting or view such a state of affairs as desirable or good. If asked ‘What do you want to do now?’ you might answer ‘I want to go for a walk’, where the content of your desire seems to be ‘to go for a walk’, not what you see as good or valuable about going for a walk. So too on the natural understanding of Aristotle’s examples just mentioned (the ancient Greek equivalents of ‘to eat some caviar’ or ‘that Robert De Niro win an Oscar’, and so on).⁵

The appropriate thing to say here, I think, is that the action or state of affairs desired or the content of the desire does not generally reveal the requisite evaluative dimension because it is not a sufficiently full specification of what is desired. If you want to go for a walk, you presumably believe that going for a walk is valuable in some respect, say, because you expect it to provide you with fresh air, or to get you out in the sunshine, and you find such things pleasurable.⁶ Equally, Aristotle takes it to be built into his

⁵ Thus whereas the content of a desire to Φ need not reveal what the agent sees as good about Φ -ing, the object of desire, on Aristotle’s understanding, must; contrast Stampe (1987: 336, and 336n.3). In some cases it can seem appropriate to say that the content of the desire reveals the object of desire, e.g. ‘I want to eat that delicious ice cream’. In such cases, desire-contents seem to incorporate the requisite representational state; i.e. we have not simply ‘ Φ -ing’, but ‘ Φ -ing is good in respect c ’. (This point relates to the question of whether we should countenance ‘besires’, mental states that have both mind-to-world and world-to-mind direction of fit – but this issue is not crucial for me here; see e.g. Altham (1986) and Smith (1994: 118–25).)

⁶ Thus the object of desire will be revealed by the answer to the question ‘Why do you want to go for a walk?’ (although there will no doubt be different levels of answer that could be given to that question).

notion of *epithumia* that it is a desire for pleasure, and takes it to be built into his notion of *boulêsis* that it is a desire for something taken to be good. Thus, for example, the desire to eat some caviar will actually be short for the desire to eat some caviar because one believes that that will provide one with sensory pleasure (or some more specific manifestation of this desirability feature), and the relevant specification of the desire for an athlete to win a race will be that he win the race because that is believed to be good in some way (see [Chapter 6](#), pp. 155–6 below, for discussion of what this might be). Suppose, then, that we maintain that in order to capture the specific object of desire, the relevant specification of the desire to eat some caviar needs to be (something like):

[Dc]: I desire to eat some caviar because I believe that eating some caviar would provide me with pleasure.

It seems clear that the evaluative dimension of the desire is revealed in the content of the belief that forms a component of this fuller specification of the desire, not in the act of eating caviar or the content ‘to eat some caviar’.⁷ So, too, the relevant specification of the desire (= a hope; see [Chapter 1](#), §5) that Bolt wins the 100 metre race will be (something like):

[Db]: I desire Bolt to win the 100m race because I believe that Bolt winning the 100m race would be good in some way.

Again, the evaluative dimension of the desire seems to be revealed in the content of the belief that forms a component of this fuller specification of the hope, not in the state of affairs desired (which will often match the content of my hope).

However, although the object of desire in a specific case is not manifested in the simple specification of the action or state of affairs desired, but in the content of the cognitive state that explains why the agent desires the act or state of affairs in question to occur, we still need to specify more precisely what the object of desire in some specific case is. What exactly, in this context, does the phrase ‘object of desire’ pick out? As mentioned, the general desirability characteristics, ‘pleasure’ and ‘good’, do

⁷ As we shall see later on in this chapter, Aristotle thinks that belief is only one of the cognitive states that can provide such content.

seem plausible candidates for the most general specifications of the correlative objects of *epithumia* or *boulêsis* (although we shall need to consider the range of pleasures and goods that can count as the objects of *epithumia* and *boulêsis* respectively; see [Chapters 4](#) and [6](#) below). But the object of desire in some specific case seems to need to make reference *both* to a desirability feature *and also* to the specific action or state of affairs desired. So we seem to be left with two possible candidates for what the object of desire in some specific case might be:

- (i) The content of the relevant belief, e.g. ‘that eating some caviar would provide me with pleasure’ or ‘that Bolt winning the 100m race would be good’.
- (ii) The action or state of affairs desired under *the guise or mode of presentation* of the general desirability-characteristic (or a more specific manifestation of it, e.g., the pleasurable sensation of eating caviar or the specific good achieved through Bolt winning the race).⁸

The following consideration might be offered in favour of characterising objects of desire in some specific case along the lines of (i), rather than (ii). It can sound natural (in action-prompting cases) to say that when we are motivated, we are motivated by grasping an object of desire. Aristotle claims that the object of desire (the *orekton*) moves us by it being grasped cognitively (*De an.* 3.10.433b11–12, quoted and discussed in §3 below). But if we are motivated by grasping objects of desire, then objects of desire, it seems, need to include reference to *prospects*. This is because it is not plausible to say that merely thinking or having a construal of, for example, some pleasurable activity will reliably move us. I can think of lots of activities, and think of them as pleasurable or good, without having desires to do them. I can, for instance, think about a pleasurable action I performed yesterday, but have

⁸ As we shall see in [Chapter 6](#), some commentators think that the object of *boulêsis* is always the agent’s (conception of his) overall good or eudaimonia. I shall reject this view and argue that lower-level ends can count as an object of *boulêsis*. But in the sense I intend, desiring something as conducive to one’s (conception of) eudaimonia might be able to count as desiring something for some specific good since a conception of eudaimonia will standardly pick out something specific.

no desire to do it today; indeed, I might now be averse to doing it. So, in so far as Aristotle is attempting to capture the cases in which one is motivated to do something, he needs more than the simple grasping or thinking of some pleasurable or good activity – he needs: grasping or thinking that the activity in question *would be* pleasant or good to do.⁹ But then one might think that the object of desire should be specified along the lines of (i) – where ‘that eating some caviar would provide me with pleasure’ would be an example of an object of desire – not (ii), because instances of (i) make the required reference to prospects, whereas instances of (ii), e.g. the pleasurable experience of eating caviar, do not.

However, there is a key problem with view (i) as an account of what an object of desire in some specific case is. Suppose I form a desire and the object of desire motivates me to act to realise my desire. Suppose also that nothing prevents me from acting in accordance with my desire and I do indeed get what I want and it is just as I anticipated it would be. Call this ‘satisfying’ the desire. *What* do I ‘get’ when I satisfy my desire? Oddly, on view (i), in satisfying my desire, I cannot be said to get the object of desire. The object of desire, on this view, is e.g. ‘that eating some caviar would provide me with pleasure’. But I do not ‘get’ or grasp *that* by satisfying my desire – I *already* have or grasp that content simply owing to the fact that I possess the desire: I grasped ‘that eating some caviar would provide me with pleasure’ *before* I took steps to satisfy the desire since ‘that eating some caviar would provide me with pleasure’ was part of the specification of the desire that revealed its evaluative dimension (see [Dc]) (hence ‘getting’ the object of desire, in sense (i), is simply part of what it means to possess a desire). But this means that, as an interpretation of ‘object of desire’, view (i) is very odd indeed. For, on this view, I am motivated by objects of desire, but since objects of desire are things that I already encounter, I must be motivated by them to get

⁹ Tuozzo’s (1994) interpretation of Aristotle’s account of desires as ‘mental predications’ seems to be vitiated by the fact that he does not see clearly that desires require envisaging prospects (or at least, as we shall see below, counterfactual scenarios): many of the (sensory) ‘mental predications’ he describes are actually pleasures and pains, or the entertaining of such pleasures and pains, not desires.

something other than the object of desire itself; and this sounds highly counter-intuitive.

This consideration also naturally points in favour of view (ii) as the correct account of what ‘object of desire’ means in some specific case. For *what* would objects of desire motivate us to get, on view (i)? The answer would seem to be: the action or state of affairs desired under the guise or mode of presentation of the general desirability-characteristic (or some specific manifestation of it), e.g. the pleasure of eating caviar. And of course this is just the second candidate for ‘object of desire’ that I mentioned. So if we want to be able to say that objects of desire are both what motivate us and also what we ‘get’ if we satisfy our desire, then view (ii) seems to be the best candidate.¹⁰

But what about the fact, mentioned above, that view (ii) does not appear to make the required reference to prospects? In order to deal with this, the suggestion has to be that instead of claiming that we are motivated by grasping an object of desire, we say that we are motivated by grasping *the prospect of* an object of desire, where an object of desire is (as (ii) states) ‘the pleasure of Φ -ing’, or some such. On this account, when Aristotle claims that the object of desire (orekton) moves us by being grasped cognitively (*De an.* 3.10.433b11–12), this must be taken as short for the claim that grasping *the prospect of* an object of desire is what moves us.¹¹ The proposal, then, is that it is (ii), the action or state of affairs desired under the guise or mode of presentation of the general desirability-characteristic (or some specific manifestation of it), that Aristotle means by objects of desire in specific cases.

An additional point should be emphasised. It is not the case that if I am motivated by the prospect of an object of desire to perform some action, and act accordingly, I will necessarily ‘get’ the object of desire, that is, satisfy my desire. I might be

¹⁰ That Aristotle would think this way is suggested by the fact that he characterises his general correlative objects of the different species of orexis as, e.g. pleasure, not *prospective* pleasure, and good, not *prospective* good. This feature of his account would presumably carry over to specific objects of desire for it is reasonable to think that objects of desire in specific cases are just more specified versions of these correlative objects.

¹¹ Which is reasonable enough given that the *De an.* 3.10 passage comes within a discussion of animal locomotion – Aristotle presumably has in mind cases in which animals move spatially owing to their grasping the prospect of some object of desire.

motivated to eat some caviar by the prospect of some specific pleasurable sensation that I expect eating caviar to provide, only to discover that the taste that I actually encounter is not the taste I anticipated, and that I do not in fact like the taste. This may happen for a variety of reasons. For instance, I may have false expectations of the sensory experience that caviar (or this particular type of caviar) will provide, or the jar may have been damaged, and so on. In such cases, we should say that although I acted in accordance with my desire to eat some caviar, and was motivated by the prospect of the object of desire, I did not get what I desired. Rather, the object of desire is what I *would have got* if my desire had been satisfied and the activity in question had been encountered under the precise guise or mode of presentation that I desired it under. Thus, if my object of desire is the pleasure of eating caviar, where this is understood to pick out the quite specific pleasure that I believe eating caviar will provide me with, I only ‘get’ this object of desire if I eat some caviar and it is indeed pleasurable in the precise way that I anticipated. The object of desire, then, is the good or pleasure that I seek to get, and what I actually ‘get’, if I act in accordance with the desire, may fail to provide this.¹²

Before we move on, it is worthwhile noting what (i) actually characterises. With action-prompting desires, (i) picks out what we might call ‘the source of motivation’ or ‘the motive power’, that is, the content that serves to move the creature to act. With hopes and future-directed wishes, (i) standardly picks out the reason for the hope or wish, what it is that the agent thinks would be good about the state of affairs in question being realised. It is (i), rather than (ii), that picks out the source of motivation because, strictly speaking, we are not motivated by objects of desire, pleasures or goods themselves, but by *the prospect of* objects of desire, and this is just what (i) captures. And it is (i), rather than (ii), that picks out the reason for our hopes and future-directed wishes because, strictly speaking, it is *the prospect of* objects of desire

¹² Alternatively, one might think that Aristotle would say that the object of desire, in the failing cases, is only apparently good. But I argue in [Chapter 3](#) below that this is not in fact what he would have said.

that serves as the reason for our hopes or future-directed wishes, not objects of desire themselves.

2. Do all desires require envisaging prospects?

I have referred to desires as involving envisaging the prospect of an object of desire. This characterisation seems to fit action-prompting desires, hopes and future-directed wishes. The question I wish to address in this section is whether or not all desires are like this.

It seems to be built into the notion of an action-prompting desire that it involves envisaging a prospect. For, by the phrase ‘action-prompting desire’, we do not mean a desire that prompts just any action, however indirectly related to the desire in question it may be, as, for example, a desire to communicate with someone might prompt one to clear one’s throat. Rather, we mean to pick out desires that prompt an agent to act so as to realise the object of desire, as that is manifest in the full specification of the desire in question (see §1 above). So characterised, it seems clear that action-prompting desires require envisaging prospects: they involve the agent cognising that some action *would be* pleasurable or good, for example.

Are there any counter-examples? Could not an agent form a desire whilst already encountering the object of that desire, and so not need to envisage the prospect of that object of desire? Suppose, for example, that Freddie forms a desire for another pint of beer whilst finishing up his current one. If the content of Freddie’s object of desire is ‘the pleasurable taste of beer’, it might seem that this content is provided by his current encounter and so does not require grasping a prospect. The problem with this is that the pleasurable taste of the current beer is not the object of Freddie’s present desire (the pleasurable taste of the current beer is presumably instead the object of a prior desire, a desire that Freddie is now ‘satisfying’). Freddie’s present object of desire is the pleasurable taste of a beer that he *does not* currently encounter (and this holds even if he desires the very same *type* of beer). Indeed, the barrel may have been finished in the meantime, and he may not

be able to satisfy his present desire at all. Thus, if the pleasurable taste of the beer that Freddie is currently drinking is to serve as an object of desire that can motivate him, it must be ‘taken up’ and construed as something that would be *prospectively* pleasurable. In the case at hand, Freddie would be motivated by the prospect of drinking another pint similar to the one he is currently drinking. Thus, even in cases in which one is currently encountering the object of desire, action-prompting desires are future directed.

If we turn from action-prompting desires to the orexeis that we have characterised as wishes and hopes (see [Chapter 1](#), §5), Aristotle again appears to have future-directed desires in mind. Consider the boulêseis he mentions in *NE* and *EE*, to rule all mankind or to be immortal (*NE* 3.2.1111b22–23, *EE* 2.10.1225b32–34). These appear to be cases in which agents recognise that the state of affairs in question could not possibly come about. But the desired outcome is one that the agent wishes *would* come about, and so the desire is still directed at a future prospect, albeit an impossible one. Similarly with Aristotle’s examples of boulêsis that seem to be hopes (in Anscombe’s sense; see p. 31 above); namely, boulêseis that a particular athlete or actor win a competition. These appear to be longings for some state of affairs to occur without one bringing it about oneself. But again they seem to be future-directed.

What about a wish that something one is currently experiencing will continue unabated? For example, suppose that just as Olga is walking along a beach with a beautiful sunset in progress, she finds herself wishing that the experience would continue indefinitely. In this scenario, is not Olga already ‘getting’ her object of desire? The answer is that, as with the example about Freddie’s beer above, although Olga is already ‘getting’ her object of desire in one sense, namely, in the sense that her desire to experience walking along the beach with a beautiful sunset is currently being satisfied, her wish concerns that event *continuing* into the future, and so requires her to grasp the prospect of such an experience continuing into the future. The same holds with a desire that things will stay just the same as they are now. If Frank experiences an extremely high point in his life, because a number of things have gone exceptionally well, he might find himself wishing that things

stay just as they are. But even though Frank would not, in such a situation, want something to change in the future, it is nonetheless future prospects that he is concerned with: he wants the future to remain *as it is now*.

However, some wishes seem to be different. In *NE* 6.2 Aristotle writes:

Nothing that is past is an object of choice, e.g. no one chooses to have sacked Troy; for no one deliberates about the past, but about what is future and contingent, while what is past is not capable of not having taken place; hence Agathon is right in saying: 'For this alone is lacking even to God, To make undone things that have once been done.' (1139b5–11)

But although one cannot choose and deliberate about the past, one might think that it is perfectly possible to have *wishes* about the past. One might wish that Troy *had not been* sacked, just as one may wish that one's grandfather *had not* died, or that a particular athlete *had won* the race. These seem possible things to have *boulêseis* for. Likewise, it seems possible to have wishes directed at a *present* state of affairs. One might wish that one's grandfather were now alive, that the weather were better, or that one were fitter or happier. Thus it does seem, after all, that desires (at least sub-specie wishes) need not be future directed: the object of desire in such cases pertains to the past or the present.

What these backward-directed and present-directed wishes have in common with action-prompting desires (and hopes and future-directed wishes) is that each, more minimally, involves envisaging counterfactual scenarios, in so far as each type of desire involves envisaging an object of desire that does not currently obtain. This applies to action-prompting desires, hopes and future-directed wishes in the sense we have specified, namely, that the object of desire is one that the agent thinks *would be* pleasant or good to occur in the future (even if he is already encountering it now). But backward-directed and present-directed wishes also make reference to counterfactual scenarios. It is hard to wish that Troy had not been sacked or that one's grandfather were here now if one knows full well that Troy was sacked or that one's grandfather is sitting in front of one. Built into the concept of such wishes is the notion that the state of affairs referred to does not currently obtain. Thus even though such wishes are not future-directed, they

still require the agent to grasp something that does not currently obtain. In general, though, it seems likely that the great majority of desires are future-directed and, at any rate, that all action-prompting desires are such.

One commentator argues against my general line here and maintains that Aristotle countenances desires that do not require envisaging prospects or entertaining counterfactual scenarios. Hendrik Lorenz (2006: 141) refers to Aristotle's example in the *Historia animalium* of a sponge contracting when an attempt is made to detach it from its rock (5.16.548b10–15). Lorenz claims:

[Aristotle] can say that the sponge perceives the occurrent process of gradually being detached as being intensely painful; that it is therefore strongly averse to it; and that this aversion expresses itself in avoidance behaviour, which involves contraction. We might think that in cases such as this one there is no need to attribute to the creature in question any ability to envisage prospective situations, situations that do not currently obtain. For behaviour of the kind reportedly manifested by sponges could, it seems reasonable to think, be explained just in terms of perception and what we might call pro-attitudes or contra-attitudes to items that the animal apprehends in acts of perception – for instance, occurrent states or processes. (2006: 141)

According to Lorenz, the behaviour of, for example, sponges can be accounted for just in terms of perception and pro-/contra-attitudes (the latter presumably involving certain 'items' appearing pleasant or painful). And since such perceptions and pro-/contra-attitudes are responses to occurrent states, rather than directed at prospective ones, Lorenz holds that they do not involve envisaging prospective situations or counterfactual scenarios.¹³ Instead, he maintains that the sponge is strongly averse to (the process of) being detached because it experiences being detached as intensely painful.

What does 'being averse' amount to here? It seems that it cannot in any way involve the sponge cognising that it would be better to be attached again, since when the sponge is not currently attached it has no present experience of being attached, and so for it to have

¹³ Lorenz only appeals to prospective situations, not counterfactual scenarios, but since he holds both that the sponge only possesses the capacity of perception and that perception in general is restricted to registering what one presently encounters (see §4 below), he would also claim more generally that the sponge cannot grasp counterfactual scenarios. It is unclear to me whether or not Aristotle would allow that sponges can envisage prospects to some limited extent, but for the sake of the present discussion I shall follow Lorenz and assume that they cannot.

some cognition about being attached it would have to be envisaging a prospect.¹⁴ So it seems that, in terms of the creature's experiences, 'being averse' can only amount to the sponge feeling distress at the fact of being detached, a state with content equivalent to 'this is unpleasant!', and nothing in addition to that. But, on this notion of 'aversion', an aversion seems equivalent to a pain, i.e. cognising something as unpleasant, and not to amount to a conative state.

If we are actually to ascribe a *desire* to the sponge, we need to ask what that desire would be *for*, on Lorenz's view.¹⁵ Presumably, the object of desire would be the pleasure of being fully attached to the rock. But the sponge is not now fully attached to the rock, and so does not encounter this state of affairs; and the sponge has no cognitive capacity that would allow it to entertain the prospect of such an object of desire. This means that the sponge would be in the peculiar predicament of having a desire, a desire which has an object (because all desires have objects, however vague or inchoate), but not being able to grasp or cognise the object of its desire. And yet one might not unreasonably think that this is incoherent: to ascribe a desire to some creature seems to require that it *envisage* the object of desire in question. Or else 'desire' would seem to be being used in some purely behavioural sense.

Let us explore this further. Lorenz holds that the sponge's 'aversion' 'expresses itself' in avoidance behaviour, which 'involves contraction'. The sponge, it seems, reacts to the process of being detached by contracting (and presumably this might result, in some cases at least, in the detachment not fully occurring, and the sponge becoming fully *reattached* before it has been fully *detached*). But the sponge's contraction cannot be said to be a response to its being

¹⁴ The same point would apply to the sponge being partially detached: being averse to being partially detached cannot in any way involve the sponge cognising that it would be better to become fully attached again, since when the sponge is not fully attached it has no present experience of being fully attached, and so for it to have some cognition about being fully attached it would have to be envisaging a prospect.

¹⁵ In the context of his discussions of animal locomotion, Aristotle claims that every desire is for the sake of something (*De an.* 3.10.433a15), and appears to mean that each desire is for the sake of some cognised goal (he continues: 'for the object of desire is the starting-point of the practical intellect': 3.10.433a15–16). Lorenz thinks that *De an.* 3.9–10 is tacitly restricted to considering desires that can lead to locomotion, which he accepts require envisaging prospects, but he would surely not deny that all desires have objects.

attracted to the possibility of being fully attached. For, as we have noted, at the point at which it is half-detached, the sponge cannot perceive itself as fully attached (since its perceptions only register occurrent encounters), and since it cannot envisage prospects, it cannot entertain the prospect of being fully attached. Instead, it seems, the sponge experiences a pain, and then simply finds itself contracting in response to that.

Would not such a response be better characterised as some kind of instinctive behavioural reaction to a certain sensory stimulus than as a reaction to a desire? In a footnote, Lorenz notes that Christof Rapp pointed out to him:

the explanation of the sponge's contracting may have much the same structure as the explanation of what happens when you accidentally put your hand on a very hot object. (2006: 141n.12)

But do we talk of *desire* in such cases? It seems to me that if we do so, it would only be in a tenuous sense. Did Rapp want to get burnt? Of course not. But that is not the same as saying that in moving his hand, Rapp responded to a specific desire not to be burnt. Rapp's action is not *under the control of* a desire, nor can it be said to be motivated by an object of desire. It is an involuntary reaction to some sensory stimulus.

Would Aristotle agree with this diagnosis? At the beginning of *De motu an.* 11, having (by then) 'explained how animals move with voluntary motions, and for what reasons' (703b3–4), he claims:

But they also display involuntary movements in some of their parts, and more often non-voluntary movements. By involuntary I mean such movements as the heart and the penis; for often these are moved when something appears, but without the command of thought. By non-voluntary, [I mean] movements such as sleep and waking and respiration, and all the others of this kind; for neither phantasia nor desire is, strictly speaking, in control of any of these. (703b3–11)

This suggests that the sponge's contraction or Rapp's jerking his hand back from a hot kettle would be considered by Aristotle to be involuntary or non-voluntary movements that are not 'under the control' of desire.¹⁶

¹⁶ In fact, it is precisely to the extent that we allow in the envisaging of prospects that we become prepared to accept that the response is desire-based. If I put my hand on a fairly

It seems reasonable, then, to think that desires, for Aristotle, must both exhibit intentionality – be directed at, about, or of objects and states of affairs – and also involve envisaging prospects, or at least counterfactual scenarios. Responding to a desire involves reacting to an envisaged object of desire in such a way that the action can be said to be under the control of a desire. This is lacking in the responses of the sponge.

3. Thought-based and phantasia-based desires

If an object of desire in a specific case should be understood as the action or state of affairs desired under the guise or mode of presentation of the general desirability characteristic in question, or some specific manifestation of it (see end of §1 above), the question remains: which cognitive capacities does Aristotle think are capable of envisaging objects of desire? In *De an.* 3.10, he writes:

that which produces movement ... is first of all the object of desire; for this produces movement without being moved, by being thought of or grasped through phantasia (*tô noêthênai ê phantasthênai*) ... (433b10–12)

This passage distinguishes envisaging objects of desire via the capacity of thought from envisaging objects of desire via the capacity of phantasia.¹⁷ By the end of *De an.* 3.10 Aristotle writes:

In general, therefore, as we have said, in so far as the animal is capable of desire so far is it capable of moving itself; and it is not capable of desire without phantasia. And all phantasia is either concerned with reasoning (*logistikê*) or perception (*aisthêtikê*). In the latter then the other animals share also. (433b27–30)

hot object and leave it there as the pain increases, and I begin to think ‘actually, this is not very nice, I think I’ll remove it’, so then we are prepared to say that I am responding to my desire to move my hand.

¹⁷ See also the beginning of *De motu an.* 8 (701b33–35). Later on in that chapter, Aristotle claims (702a17–19): ‘the affections suitably prepare the organic parts, desire the affections, and phantasia the desire; and phantasia comes about either through thought (*noêsis*) or through perception’. Nussbaum (1978: 232–41) thinks that this assigns a general role to phantasia in every action. Schofield (2011) argues at length that the proper understanding of Aristotle’s argument in *De motu an.* reveals that it does no such thing. (Let me add that the notion of phantasia ‘coming about’ through thought could either refer to the fact that when one thinks, one necessarily thinks in phantasmata, or to the idea that a thought one might have which is itself grounded in a phantasia, might lead to another separate phantasia.)

Aristotle's main treatment of perceptual phantasia is in *De an.* 3.3. The details of this account are the subject of much scholarly dispute, and I am unable to address the problems in this book.¹⁸ Instead, I shall simply assert that perceptual phantasia, as I understand Aristotle, amounts to an 'appearance', 'construal' or 'representation' that derives from perception in some way (a 'movement which comes about as a result of the activity of perception': *De an.* 3.3.428b25–26, 429a1–2), but is not restricted to occurrent perceptual encounters (see e.g. *Insomn.* 1.459a14–22, *De an.* 3.3.429a1–2). Contents of perceptual phantasias, phantasmata, are thus *quasi*-perceptual, but capable of representing future states of affairs (as in action-prompting desires, hopes, future-directed wishes and expectations more generally), past states of affairs (as in memories and backwards-directed wishes), or indeed present states of affairs that are not being encountered perceptually in a strict sense (as in dreams, daydreams and present-directed wishes).¹⁹ When Aristotle mentions phantasia, he standardly has perceptual phantasia in mind; but, as we see, in the *De an.* 3.10 passage above he introduces another kind of phantasia, a deliberative variety, which he contrasts with this. He explains a bit more about the deliberative kind of phantasia in *De an.* 3.11:

Phantasia concerned with perception, as we have said, is found in the other animals, but that concerned with deliberation (*bouleutikê*) in those which are capable of reasoning (for the decision whether to do this or that is already a task for reasoning; and one must measure by a single standard; for one pursues what is superior; hence one has the ability to make one phantasma out of many). The reason why these animals are thought not to have beliefs is that they do not have beliefs derived from reasoning (*ek sullogismou*) ... (434a5–11)

In order to decide whether to do one thing rather than another, the agent must compare two possible courses of action, and this requires reasoning. But why does Aristotle think that comparing

¹⁸ See e.g. Nussbaum (1978: essay 5), Schofield (1978) and Wedin (1988); and see Caston (2006: 331–5) for a nice summary of the disputes. I agree with Schofield (2011), contra Wedin (1988), that phantasia can count as a capacity in its own right. On phantasia in *De an.* 3.9–11, see also Labarrière (1984).

¹⁹ Aristotle maintains that phantasia is not a kind of belief (*doxa*) and argues that contents of phantasia (phantasmata) can even contradict the contents of one's beliefs (*De an.* 3.3.428a18–b9). I discuss the implications of the fact that perceptual phantasia can replace thought in my 2011a.

two possible courses of action involves making one phantasma out of many, rather than simply settling on one thought about which action to pursue? Furthermore, presumably Aristotle thinks that we can form thought-based desires not only in response to deliberation, but also in response to simple predicative thoughts (e.g. that x is valuable or good in respect y),²⁰ which would be structurally parallel to perceptual phantasia. Would such simple thought-based desires also require phantasia?

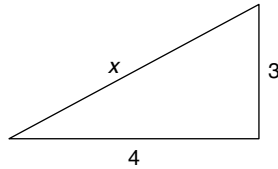
The most likely answer to the second question also provides a plausible explanation of why Aristotle thinks that deliberation requires making one phantasma out of many. This is that these simple thought-based desires would indeed require phantasia because thought in general, on Aristotle's view, is not possible without phantasia (*De an.* 3.7.431a16–17, *De an.* 3.8.432a3–14), since thought involves thinking forms 'in' phantasmata (*De an.* 3.7.431b2). If each thought requires a phantasma to think in, this would explain why decisions require making one phantasma out of many: the thoughts involved in one's deliberations would each require a phantasma (to take place 'in'), as will the thought that one resolves on, which reflects that deliberation.

In what way do thoughts require phantasmata? The idea is explained further in *De memoria*:

An account has already been given of phantasia in the discussion of the soul, and it is not possible to think without a phantasma. For the same effect occurs in thinking as in drawing a diagram. For in the latter case, though we do not make any use of the fact that the size of the triangle is determinate, we none the less draw it with determinate size. And similarly someone who is thinking, even if he is not thinking of something with a size, places something with a size before his eyes, but thinks of it not as having a size. If its nature is that of things which have a size, but not a determinate one, he places before his eyes something with a determinate size, but thinks of it simply as having size. (1.449b30–450a5, translation after Sorabji (1972: 48–9))

We are told that the same effect occurs in thinking as in drawing a diagram, and Aristotle then characterises the relevant features of drawing a diagram that he has in mind. Suppose I draw the following triangle, and ask you to calculate x :

²⁰ Aristotle offers a brief account of such thoughts in *De an.* 3.6.



Obviously one can calculate x as follows: $x = \sqrt{(3^2 + 4^2)} = \sqrt{25} = 5$. But the point here is that it does not matter that the triangle I have sketched does not appear to have sides that are 3, 4 and 5 (4 is actually about twice the size of 3 on my sketch). As Aristotle points out, in drawing such diagrams one does not make any use of the fact that the triangle has a determinate size, but nonetheless the triangle I drew does, as a matter of fact, have a determinate size. Aristotle claims that thinking is parallel to this. Suppose, to take his second case, the thing one thinks about is such as to have a size, but not a determinate size. Aristotle claims that in such cases we place before our eyes (i.e. imagine) something with determinate size, but think of it simply as having size (i.e. indeterminate size). An example of this might be thinking of an indeterminately sized tree or stone. If asked to imagine such a thing, one would, on this account, mentally place something before one's eyes with determinate size, but think of it simply as having size, not the determinate size one gave it. Hence the thought of the indeterminately sized tree would be *dependent on* the phantasma that one conjures up, but not what that phantasma itself depicts.

If it is in some such way that Aristotle envisages thoughts to require phantasia, he would only really possess one notion of phantasia after all, the perceptual variety. Deliberative phantasia will refer to the perceptual phantasmata that are bound up with the thoughts that take place in deliberation. Equally, however, Aristotle's account will seem highly improbable. For we would want to know (i) why we should presume that phantasmata *must* be present when we think of something, and (ii) what the phantasmata would be that underlie extremely complicated thoughts, or thoughts that do not seem sensory in any way (e.g. 'that virtue is necessary for eudaimonia', or 'that the soul is a second

actuality', or indeed 'that all thought requires phantasia').²¹ But from the perspective of the plausibility of Aristotle's account of desire, the dependency he envisages of thought (and so deliberation) on phantasia is not crucial. All that is important is the general idea that thought-based desires involve envisaging some object of desire; an idea that would survive intact even if we gave up the notion that thoughts require phantasmata in the way that Aristotle presumes. We would then be left with the account suggested in the passage I quoted from *De an.* 3.10 at the beginning of this section (433b10–12): (action-prompting) desires involve the agent envisaging the prospect of some object of desire either through thought or through perceptual phantasia. Desires that are formed in response to deliberation would count as a certain kind of the former.

4. Can perception envisage objects of desire, for Aristotle?

In the other passage from *De anima* 3.10 that I quoted near the beginning of the last section (433b27–30), Aristotle claimed that a creature is not capable of desire without phantasia. This seems to entail that creatures that only possess the capacity for perception cannot possess the capacity of desire. If this is Aristotle's view, as I believe it is, then we should consider why he holds it. This is my task in this final section of the present chapter. I shall also address the interpretation of one commentator who, even in the light of the *De an.* 3.10 passage just mentioned, denies that Aristotle thinks that desire requires phantasia.

Why might Aristotle think that a creature that only possesses the capacity of perception could not have desires? One answer is that he has in mind a certain account of perception which makes this impossible. At the beginning of *De memoria*, he considers

²¹ It is worth noting, however, that despite Aristotle's emphasis of 'placing something before one's eyes', in the *Mem.* passage above (see also e.g. *De an.* 3.3.429a2–4), phantasmata are not simply mental *images*. Conjured up sounds, tastes, smells and touches can all presumably count as phantasmata, without any image present. I could e.g. imagine the sound of a Harley Davidson starting up.

what memory is *of*. After noting that it is not possible to remember the future, he goes on:

Nor is memory of the present; rather perception is, for by perception we know neither the future nor the past, but only the present. But memory is of the past. No one would say that he was remembering what was present, when it was present, e.g. this white thing when he was seeing it; nor would he say he was remembering the object of his theorising when he was in the act of theorising and thinking. Rather, he says simply that he is perceiving the one, and exercising knowledge of the other. (I.449b13–18, translation after Sorabji (1972: 47))

On this view, perception only allows us to know (‘apprehend’, ‘grasp’, ‘become acquainted with’: *gnôrizēin*) the present. Now in fact there is more than one way that this view might be understood. On one interpretation, what we might call a ‘*de dicto* reading’, perception is tied to the present because its content can only ever report occurrent encounters.²² On this view, perception can, for example, tell us that the apple is red, but not that the apple is *about to* redden, or some such. If, in restricting perception to the present, in the *De memoria* passage, Aristotle had in mind this *de dicto* reading, he would have a good reason for thinking that perception cannot itself generate desires. For, as we have seen in §2, envisaging objects of desire requires grasping prospects, or at least counterfactual scenarios. So, if perception can only report occurrent encounters, it would not itself enable us to grasp an object of desire, and if we cannot grasp an object of desire, we cannot possess a desire.

It is worthwhile warding off a potential misunderstanding of this view. Cannot one see an apple on the other side of the room and be moved to get it? Indeed one can. There is no reason to think that Aristotle wishes to deny that perception can provide the information that may *trigger* a desire (see esp. *NE* 7.6.1149a34–1149b1, quoted in [Chapter 5](#), §3, below). As he notes, the scent of hares may trigger a response in a dog, and the lowing of the ox may trigger a response in the lion (even though neither delights in these things *per se*, but recognises from them the presence of the hare or the ox) (*NE* 3.10.1118a18–23). But there is a difference between a capacity triggering a desire and that capacity envisaging

²² This view is asserted by e.g. Lorenz (2006: 132) and Pearson (2011a: 102–3) (I am now less sure that this is Aristotle’s view).

an object of desire. The former only requires that the capacity provides information in the light of which the agent forms a desire, and all manner of information can potentially do this, and there is no reason to think that perception cannot provide such information.²³ The latter, by contrast, requires that the capacity represents something as prospectively or counterfactually valuable in some way, for example, that an apple *would be* pleasurable to eat. It is this envisaging of the object of desire that cannot be achieved by perception alone, on the *de dicto* reading of Aristotle's claim that perception is tied to the present. Thus, even when the agent sees the apple and this triggers a desire to eat it, the desire itself goes beyond his occurrent perception and involves envisaging the apple in the respect in which it is desired.²⁴

I mentioned that there is more than one way we might understand the claim that perception only allows us to apprehend the present. On the second view, what we might call a '*de re* reading', perception is tied to the present only because it must be *of* (*de re*) something presently encountered, not because it can only make reports in the present tense. On this view, it is possible to see the apple as *about to* redden; for, so long as one's encounter is of (*de re*) something presently encountered, there is no specific restriction on the content of the perceptual state.²⁵

It might seem that this view would fail to give the required result for the case we are interested in. For if perceptual content is not restricted in the way that the *de dicto* reading suggests, and perception is able to envisage prospects or counterfactual scenarios, it would seem that perception could envisage objects of desire, and so itself account for the formation of a desire without

²³ On my view, it is desire-triggers that Aristotle is referring to in *De motu an.* 6 when he places perception on a list of capacities that can move the animal (700b17–23). (I agree with Lorenz (2006: 130n.19) and Schofield (2011: 122n.9), contra Nussbaum (1976: 144), that perception (*aisthêsis*) should be on this original list at 700b17, given that it is subsequently discussed as though it were; see 700b20.)

²⁴ But cannot one *see* an apple as attractive to eat? If 'seeing the apple as attractive' is short for 'the apple looks like it *would be* pleasant (to eat)', then, as mentioned, this seems beyond the reach of perception on the *de dicto* reading. If instead, 'seeing the apple as attractive' is only meant to be some kind of sensory report, then the information can be provided by perception, on the *de dicto* reading, but the report will not involve envisaging prospects.

²⁵ I believe that Victor Caston is developing a view that would fit this kind of analysis.

the involvement of *phantasia*. There is reason to think, however, that even on the *de re* reading of Aristotle's restriction of perception to the present, a creature would have to possess *phantasia* in order to envisage prospects or counterfactual scenarios. Aristotle divides objects of perception into three kinds: *special* ('whatever cannot be perceived by another sense', e.g. 'sight has colour, hearing sound, taste flavour': *De an.* 2.6.418a11–13), *common* (e.g. 'movement, rest, number, figure, size': 2.6.418a17–18), and *incidental* (e.g. 'if the white thing were the son of Diaries; for you perceive this incidentally, since this which you perceive is incidental to the white thing': 2.6.418a21–23). Without going into the basis of this division, it seems likely that a perceptual encounter that makes reference to evaluative prospects or counterfactual scenarios would have to be an instance of incidental perception. Just as one might perceive that the white thing is the son of Diaries (*De an.* 2.6.418a21), so too (given the *de re* reading) one might perceive, for example, that the red thing (an apple) is something that *would be* pleasant to eat.²⁶ But incidental perception, on Aristotle's account, involves associating a special perceptible with some other predicate and it seems likely that this predicate must itself be supplied by some other cognitive source.²⁷ With the example 'the white [thing] is the son of Diaries', 'the white' is a special object of perception, and is associated with 'the son of Diaries'; but 'the son of Diaries' itself, it seems, is neither a special nor a common perceptible, and so must come from some other cognitive source.²⁸ And since *phantasia* is the next state up in Aristotle's hierarchy of psychological capacities (for, in its basic form, it is a modification of perception: see §3 above), the cognitive source supplying the predicate must, minimally, be it. So if perceiving an evaluative prospect is an incidental perception, and

²⁶ For the scope of common perceptibles, see Gregoric (2007: 31, 31n.11, II.4).

²⁷ See also Caston (1996: 42, 1998: 272).

²⁸ With incidental perception, quality becomes the subject or substrate of which other categories are predicated, so we have, e.g. 'the white is the son of Diaries' (*De an.* 2.6.418a21), rather than 'the son of Diaries is white'. Cashdollar (1973, 163) saw that the reason for this was that while thought would usually ask: 'what is the son of Diaries' or 'where is the son of Diaries', etc., perception instead asks 'what is the white', 'where is the white', etc.

incidental perception generally involves phantasia (or thought, which itself involves phantasia) then perceiving an evaluative prospect would require phantasia. ‘The red’ (the apple) would be a special object of perception, and would be associated with ‘something that would be pleasurable to eat’, which would (minimally) have to be supplied by phantasia.

If this is right, the upshot is that whether we adopt the *de dicto* or the *de re* reading of Aristotle’s claim that perception is tied to the present, there is reason to think that creatures cannot possess desires if they do not possess phantasia. On the *de dicto* reading, this would be because perception itself cannot envisage prospects or counterfactual scenarios and so cannot envisage objects of desire. On the *de re* reading, it would be because although perception can envisage prospects or counterfactual scenarios it can only do so in so far as it itself involves phantasia.²⁹ Either way, the claim that a creature is not capable of desire without phantasia would be upheld.

However, contrary to my current argument, one commentator – Hendrik Lorenz (2006: Ch. 10) – has argued that some texts suggest that Aristotle thinks that desire can occur through perception alone, without the help of phantasia. In *De an.* 2.3 Aristotle writes:

Plants have the nutritive capacity only; other creatures have both this and the capacity of perception. And if the capacity of perception, then the orektikon also; for orexis comprises epithumia, thumos and boulêsis: all animals have at least one of the senses, touch, and for that which has perception, there is both pleasure and pain and both the pleasant and the painful: and where there are these, there is also epithumia, for this is orexis for the pleasant. (414a32–414b6)

This passage seems to imply that so long as a creature possesses the capacity of perception then it must *ipso facto* possess the orektikon (at least in the form of epithumia). And yet in a number of other passages, Aristotle claims that some animals possess the

²⁹ Both readings would have to acknowledge that Aristotle sometimes uses perception in a broader sense than they propose; for it seems clear that Aristotle sometimes employs an extended notion of perception which includes *both* perception proper *and* perceptual phantasia (see *Insomn.* 1.459a14–22, and *Mem.* 1.450a22–23 with 1.451a16–17). The narrow notion is manifest when Aristotle lists phantasia and perception as distinct discriminatory capacities (*kritika*); see e.g. *De motu an.* 6.700b19–21.

capacity of perception, but not the capacity of phantasia.³⁰ Putting these ideas together we get the notion that some creatures possess the capacity of perception and so the capacity of desire, but do not have the capacity of phantasia. Lorenz accepts this conclusion and proposes that some animals can have desires that do not involve envisaging prospects, and so do not require phantasia.³¹ On his view, phantasia is only required for desires that prompt one to locomotion, which he concedes do require envisaging prospects. To account for the clash this interpretation generates with *De an.* 3.10 (433b28–29), where Aristotle claims that creatures are not capable of desire without phantasia, Lorenz suggests that that passage should be read as tacitly restricted to desires that pertain to locomotion (2006: 145–6): phantasia is only required for desires that can lead to locomotion, on Lorenz's reading, not desire in general (cf. also Tuozzo (1994: 540–In.49)).

My argument in §2 suggests that this view is mistaken.³² Perhaps creatures are able to possess very basic perceptions

³⁰ See *De an.* 3.3.428a8–11, *De an.* 2.3.415a10–11; cf. also *An. post.* 2.19.99b34–100a3. On the other side, see *De an.* 2.2.413b22–23, on which see Lorenz (2006: 138–9, n.2). Lorenz also appeals to a passage in *De an.* 3.7 on the formation of desire (431a8–16). But this text is extremely opaque and on my view does not unequivocally support the view in question. I cannot provide a proper discussion here (I hope to on another occasion), but let me note the following points. (i) The mere fact that Aristotle does not mention phantasia when he considers perception-based desires does not show that he is envisaging such desires as not requiring phantasia. The subject of pursuit and avoidance in 431a9–10 is most likely 'the perceptual soul' (*hê aisthetikê psuchê*) – given the parallel 'the thinking soul' (*hê dianoêtikê psuchê*) at 431a14 – but this is likely to refer to perception in the broad sense (see n.29 above), which includes perceptual phantasia (or at least incidental perception, which involves phantasia), given that it said to 'pursue' or 'avoid' something (which presumably involves representing prospects), and seems to be contrasted with basic perceiving (431a8). (ii) The fact that Aristotle does mention phantasia in explaining thought-based pursuits does not entail that it is only at this point that it is employed. Aristotle claims that to the thinking soul phantasmata serve as if they were *aisthēmata* ('perceivings') (431a14–15). But this does not show that phantasia is not involved in the desires of the perceptual soul. While thoughts involve thinking forms in phantasmata (*De an.* 3.7.431b2), activities of perceptual phantasia might (sometimes) themselves take place in *aisthēmata*. In *Insomn.* 3 Aristotle claims that a dream is a phantasma based on or stemming from the movement (*apo tês kinêseôs*) of *aisthēmata*. (462a29–31). Grasping the prospect of an object of desire may sometimes similarly require phantasia operating on existing *aisthēmata*. (iii) Phantasia may in any case be required even for evaluative perceptions; see the end of this section.

³¹ Lorenz reads the connection of perception to the present in the *de dicto* way (see 2006: 132).

³² In addition, contra Lorenz (2006: 145–6), I do not think that *De an.* 3.10.433b28–29 is naturally read as tacitly restricted to desires that pertain to locomotion. Aristotle could easily have qualified his claim if he had thought such qualification necessary. Instead,

without phantasia (see below), but if they do not possess phantasia, they will not be able to envisage prospects or counterfactual scenarios. For, as we have seen, whether one adopts the *de dicto* or the *de re* reading of perception's link to the present, it seems likely that phantasia is required for such an ability. Lorenz thinks that some creatures can possess the capacity of perception (where this is understood according to the *de dicto* reading), lack the capacity of phantasia, but still have the capacity for desire. Such creatures, he maintains, 'show no sign of purposive locomotion', but 'do engage in *behaviour* that [Aristotle] will want to explain in terms of cognition and desire' (2006: 140, my emphasis). But Lorenz's putative example of a case in which a creature (the sponge) possesses and responds to a desire even though it is unable to envisage prospects or counterfactual scenarios fails to provide an example of behaviour that is 'under the control' of desire, and instead appears to illustrate some kind of involuntary or non-voluntary behavioural response (see the end of §2 above). If a creature cannot entertain prospects or counterfactual scenarios then it cannot envisage objects of desire; and yet envisaging an object of desire seems to be necessary for it to have a desire; so if a creature cannot entertain prospects or counterfactual scenarios, it cannot possess the capacity for desire.

This means that in so far as the *De an.* 2.3 passage above suggests that creatures that simply possess the capacity of perception must *ipso facto* possess the capacity of desire, Aristotle misleads us. In his defence, we might point out that in this chapter of *De anima* he is explicitly non-committal on the status of phantasia. Shortly after the passage above, he claims: 'the situation with regard to phantasia is obscure and must be considered later' (414b16). Given this, one might think that by the time he has clarified the status of phantasia, and its role in desire, he would qualify his claim in *De an.* 2.3 and maintain instead that a creature is not capable of desire except in so far as it is capable of phantasia, and hence that desire comes along not with

his remark reads as a straightforwardly general one, which in turn serves to link his discussion about the source of locomotion with a point about different sorts of phantasia, that is itself picked up in *De an.* 3.11 (434a5ff).

perception *simpliciter*, but with perceptual phantasia (see also n.34 below).³³

If this is right, it would indicate that in so far as Aristotle is also committed to the view that some animals possess perception without phantasia, he would be forced to admit that such creatures cannot possess desires. In fact, his position seems to be slightly more nuanced than this. At the beginning of *De an.* 3.11, just after claiming at the end of 3.10 that it is in so far as the animal is capable of desire that it is capable of moving itself and that it is not capable of desire without phantasia (433b27–30), he writes:

We must consider also what it is that produces movement in the imperfect animals which have perception by touch only – whether they can have phantasia and epithumia or not. For they evidently have pain and pleasure, and if these they must have epithumia also. But how could they have phantasia? Or is it that just as they are moved indeterminately (*aoristôs*), so also they have these things, but indeterminately? (433b31–434a5)

In this passage, unlike in the *De an.* 2.3 text, Aristotle does not infer that so long as a creature possesses the capacity of perception it must *ipso facto* possess the capacity of desire. Rather, he only infers that if a creature possesses pleasure and pain then it must *ipso facto* possess the capacity of desire (in the form of epithumia),³⁴ and then puzzles about how (given this, or the fact that it moves indeterminately) the creature could possibly possess phantasia. It could be that Aristotle here accepts that phantasia, epithumia and pleasure and pain all come together ‘as a bundle’, so to speak. Of course, the passage does not rule out the possibility that some creatures do not move in any way, indeterminately or otherwise (as Lorenz rightly emphasises (2006: 147)), and so

³³ This, at any rate, on my view, is what Aristotle *should* have said, given that it seems to be built into his notion of desire that it involves envisaging an object of desire, and envisaging an object of desire requires grasping prospects (or at least counterfactual scenarios). Lorenz would refer to such a reading of Aristotle as a ‘developmental’ interpretation (2006: 144). That it may be, but it is not an implication of it that Aristotle held different views ‘in his intellectual career’ (2006: 144): all that is required is that he is to a certain extent developing and qualifying his views as he goes along. And he frequently *explicitly* does just this. For example, as mentioned, in *De an.* 2.3 he claims that the situation with regard to phantasia is ‘obscure’ and so ‘must be considered later’ (414b16). Clearly, he does not think that the situation with regard to this capacity is ‘obscure’ by the time he has completed *De an.* 3.3.

³⁴ This inference is also present in the *De an.* 2.3 passage (414b4–6).

does not rule out the possibility that Aristotle would allow that some animals might lack some or other of the capacities that it refers to.³⁵ Indeed, on a number of occasions he claims that some creatures remain stationary throughout their lives (see e.g. *De an.* 2.2.413b2–4, 3.9.432b19–21, *Hist. an.* 1.1.487b6–7, 14–15, *Part. an.* 4.7.683b5–10), and one may well wonder what capacities Aristotle would ascribe to such creatures. Evidently, if they are to count as *animals*, they must possess at least some very basic form of perception.³⁶ But any capacities they may or may not possess in addition to perception might well be a matter for case-by-case investigation. The *De an.* 3.11 passage does, however, provide Aristotle with the apparatus for a more graded approach to the question of which creatures to ascribe desires to and which not. The fact that he here introduces the idea that some creatures might possess desire and phantasia in indeterminate forms opens up another option. In principle, he can allow the following three types of animal:

- (1) Creatures that possess the capacity for perception, but lack phantasia. Such creatures would not (on my reading) be able to have desires (and would also lack incidental perception).³⁷
- (2) Creatures that possess the capacity for perception, and have some indeterminate or very basic kind of phantasia. Such creatures would be able to possess very basic desires just to the extent that they possess phantasia (and would be able to possess incidental perception, to an equivalent degree).³⁸

³⁵ It is interesting that Aristotle introduces the creatures he has in mind as ones that possess 'perception by touch *only*'. Given that he then goes on to suggest that they might have some indeterminate form of phantasia, it could be the case that in claiming that some creature has perception by touch 'only', he is not intending to rule out the possibility that the creature possesses phantasia – he might only be intending to rule out its possessing perception by the other sense modalities. But then it is just possible that in *De an.* 2.3 Aristotle does not intend to imply that creatures can have desires and pleasures and pain without the capacity of phantasia.

³⁶ See esp. *De an.* 2.2.413b2–4: 'it is because of perception first of all that [living things] will be animal, for even those things which do not move or change their place, but which do have perception, we speak of as animals and not merely as living'.

³⁷ The stationary creatures that Aristotle mentions in *Hist. an.* 1.1.487b14–15, 'oysters and the so-called holothuria', might be ones that he thinks are like this.

³⁸ The creatures that move indeterminately, referred to in the *De an.* 3.11 passage above, would appear to be like this. So also, perhaps, are the species of sea anemone that

- (3) Creatures that possess the capacity for perception, and have phantasia in a full sense. Such creatures would be able to possess desires in an equivalently full sense (and incidental perception too).³⁹

What he should not allow, on my account, is a creature that possesses the capacity for desire, but does not possess the capacity for phantasia *in any sense*. This is because, as we have seen, ‘desire’, at least in a sense that does not merely equate to some kind of behavioural state (see the end of §2, pp. 45–6, above), requires phantasia: to have a desire requires envisaging a prospect, or at least a counterfactual scenario, and (as we saw earlier in this section) perception either cannot do this itself (on the *de dicto* reading) or if it can, can only do so in so far as it itself incorporates predicates supplied by phantasia (on the *de re* reading).⁴⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided some general reflections about Aristotle’s understanding of objects of desire (*orekta*). By ‘objects of desire’, he does not mean to refer to the action or state of affairs desired since, without further specification, these lack the evaluative dimension that Aristotle thinks requisite for an object of desire. General desirability characteristics, such as good or

Aristotle refers to in *Hist. an.* 1.1.487b11–13. He claims that they adhere at one time to an object and then detach themselves from it at other times, and that they ‘seek their food in the night-time loose and unattached’. If sponges are to fall into this category then they must, contra Lorenz’s description of them (see §2 above), possess at least indeterminate phantasia.

³⁹ In fact, certain kinds of desire would only be available to creatures that possess reason in addition to these capacities, and so a fourth category could be created to reflect this (see Chapter 7 below). But this is not important in the current context.

⁴⁰ Lorenz’s basic contention is that phantasia is required for purposive locomotion, but not for the desires that stationary creatures possess. Although some texts do suggest that Aristotle thinks that certain creatures could possess the capacity of perception without the capacity of phantasia (*De an.* 2.3.415a10–11, 3.3.428a8–11, *An. post.* 2.19.99b34–100a3), it is unclear to me whether he would simply identify these creatures with stationary creatures. All I will insist on is that those creatures that completely lack the capacity of phantasia must also lack the capacity of desire. Hence if some stationary creatures do have the capacity for desire, they must have the capacity for phantasia, at least in an indeterminate form.

pleasure, seem to serve as correlative objects of Aristotle's general notions of desire (*orexis*, *boulêsis* or *epithumia*), but in a particular case, the object of desire specifies the action or state of affairs desired under the guise of a general desirability feature (or a more specific manifestation of that feature). Most desires (i.e. all action-prompting desires, hopes and future-directed wishes) involve envisaging the prospect of an object of desire, but some desires only require envisaging some counterfactual scenario (backwards- and present-directed wishes). In action-prompting cases, one is not, strictly speaking, motivated by an object of desire, but instead by the *prospect* of an object of desire. In order to grasp such a prospect the animal or agent must possess *phantasia*, since even if perception can itself grasp prospects, it can only do so by employing *phantasia* in some perceptual predication. *Orexeis* that are not action prompting (e.g. hopes and wishes) also require the involvement of *phantasia* or thought, since they either involve envisaging prospects (hopes and future-directed wishes) or at least counterfactual states of affairs (backwards- and present-directed wishes).

CHAPTER 3

DESIRE (OREXIS) AND THE GOOD

In this chapter I investigate the general desirability-characteristic that serves as the correlative object of Aristotle's broadest notion of desire, viz. orexis. In *De an.* 3.10, Aristotle characterises the object of orexis, the orekton, as 'the good or the apparent good' (433a27–28, quoted in context below).¹ Our task is to understand what this characterisation amounts to. We can focus our discussion by highlighting two *prima facie* problems with Aristotle's specification:

- (P1): If by 'apparent good' Aristotle means to refer to things appearing *as* good, then there may seem to be a scope problem with his specification of the orekton. Orexis is Aristotle's broadest notion of desire. It is meant to apply to human and animal desire alike. But it might seem implausible to hold that animals can desire things *as* good.
- (P2): Aristotle connects both the orekton and also the boulêton (the object of boulêsis) to the good. But if desires are like other psychic states in that their objects are prior in respect of definition to their activities and their capacities (see [Chapter 2](#), introduction), then the genus of desire (orexis) cannot have the same object as one of its species (boulêsis), since we need to be able to distinguish these states by their objects. The object of the genus should *include* the object of the species, but not be exhausted by it, and the object of the species should pick out *part of* the object of the genus, but

¹ Aristotle is here only concerned with desires connected to locomotion, but I take his characterisation of the orekton as 'good or apparent good' to apply to all the kinds of desire we considered in [Chapter 1](#). The desires that connect to locomotion are for *prakton* (apparent) goods (*De an.* 3.10.433a29–30); see below (section 1).

not all of it. This will clearly not be possible if the object of one of the species of orexis is simply the same as the object of orexis itself.

1. *De an.* 3.10 on orexis and the good

In response to the first problem, Terence Irwin claims:

Aristotle must answer that ‘apparent good’ need not refer to something’s appearing *as* good, but may instead refer to the good that appears, even if it appears as something other than good – as pleasant, for instance. (1988: 332)

On Irwin’s interpretation, given that animals are teleologically organised, what appears to them must in general be ‘an appearance of something that is in fact good for the animal, though not necessarily an appearance of it *as* good’ (1988: 332). To say that animals aim at what appears good is not, on Irwin’s account, ‘to describe the content of their mental states, since “good” is never an intentional object of any of their desires’ (1988: 332, see also his 1980a: 52n.16). So ‘apparent good’ must refer to ‘the good that appears [to the creature as desirable (however it does so)]’, not ‘the appearance of something *as* good’.

One might object to this account that cases will frequently exist where what appears to the animal as desirable is not in fact good for it at all. Perhaps, for example, an animal may be led to desire something owing to some perceptual error; as, say, a dog may attempt to eat something poisonous because its surface properties make it appear tasty. In such cases, creatures do not desire what is ‘good for them’ or ‘what is good for them, even if it appears valuable in some way other than *as* good’. Instead, they desire something *bad*.

Irwin would reply to this objection, I take it, by insisting that he is not denying that animals can desire things that are in fact bad for them. His view is that in characterising the orekton as ‘the good or the apparent good’ Aristotle is not specifically addressing this point, but reminding the reader that appearances, what appears to animals as desirable, must (given Aristotle’s teleological account) be connected to their good even if some animals cannot desire

things *as* good since they lack the requisite cognitive capacities. This permits the possibility of error, for, as Irwin puts it, the appearances of non-rational creatures ‘must be suitably connected to their good, even though any individual appearances may fail to aim at a real good’ (1988: 332).²

However, the lines immediately preceding Aristotle’s claim that the orekton is the good or apparent good, which are linked by a connective to the line about the orekton, suggest that Irwin’s reading is mistaken. Aristotle writes:

(1) *Nous*³ then is always right; but (2) orexis and phantasia are both right and not right. Hence (*dio*) (3) it is always the orekton which produces movement, but (4) this is either the good or the apparent good ... (433a26–29, numbers inserted)

How does the ‘hence’ (*dio*) function here? (1) and (2) do not mention the idea that it is always the orekton that produces any movement (= 3), so Aristotle cannot be inferring (3) from (1) and (2). Rather, (3) seems to be assumed from earlier.⁴ Hence it seems that it is (4) – and (4) alone – that is inferred from the earlier premises of the argument. But then it is surely the fact that orexis and phantasia can be both right *and not right* (= 2) that entails that the orekton be either for the good *or for the apparent good* (= 4). If so, the reference to the apparent good arises, after all, because creatures can be mistaken. But if we have to refer to goods as ‘apparent’ because they need not actually be good, ‘apparent’ would indeed most naturally be taken to signify ‘appearing *as*’: i.e. given that the animal might be in error, the orekton need only be for what appears good, not the real good. In short, the context of the lines suggests that ‘apparent good’ does not refer to ‘a good that appears’, as Irwin holds, but (indeed) to something appearing *as* good even if it is not in fact good for the creature in question.

This of course means that we still face P1, but before we proceed, we should pause to ask how (4) can be inferred from the earlier premises. How, precisely, does the notion that the orekton

² See also Irwin (1980a: 44–5), Freeland (1994), and cf. Furley (1978).

³ How we should understand ‘*nous*’, here, will be considered below.

⁴ In one set of MSS, it has been explicitly stated at 433a21, but even if ‘orektikon’, not ‘orekton’, is read there, the view is clearly implicit in the general run of the argument leading up to 433a26–29. I discuss these textual issues in my MS ‘Aristotle on the Source of Locomotion in *De anima*’.

is the good or the apparent good relate to (1) and (2)? A number of commentators think that Aristotle means that the orekton is either the real good, as grasped by *nous*, or the apparent good, as grasped by *phantasia*.⁵ The main argument in favour of this reading stems from the text leading up to the lines we have quoted. The last portion runs:

... *nous* does not appear to produce movement without orexis (for *boulêsis* is a form of orexis, and when we are moved in accordance with our reasoning (*logismos*), we are moved in accordance with our *boulêsis* too), but orexis does produce movement contrary to reasoning; for *epithumia* is a form of orexis. (433a22–26)

Since this passage suggests that *nous* can produce movement (in the form of *boulêsis*), but orexis can produce movement contrary to *nous* (in the form of *epithumia*), one might think it likely that when Aristotle refers to *nous* in the very next lines, he is employing it in the same sense, so that the *nous* that is said to be always right is the *nous* that was producing movement in the form of *boulêsis*, and (hence) the *phantasia* that is both right and wrong is that which can produce movement contrary to reasoning in the form of *epithumia*.⁶

However, there is a major problem with this reading. In the lines immediately after the original ones we quoted near the beginning of this section (433a26–29), Aristotle continues:

... not every good but the practicable good. And it is that which can be otherwise that is practicable. (433a29–30)

In *De an.* 3.9–10 Aristotle is considering what it is in the soul that generates animal locomotion. This is why (3) states that it is the orekton *that produces movement*, and why Aristotle then specifies that the goods or apparent goods that move us *are practical*.⁷ But if real goods are grasped by *nous*, and the goods in question are practical, then the *nous* that grasps such goods must itself be practical. This is because, on Aristotle's view, 'theoretical *nous* contemplates nothing practicable, and says nothing about what is to

⁵ Hamlyn (1993: 152); Richardson (1992: 388, and n.25); Moss (2009: 126, 128).

⁶ Cf. *Metaph.* A.7.1072a27–28 and (on which) n.19 below.

⁷ Aristotle often contrasts practicable goods with theoretical or contemplative goods, goods that cannot be otherwise. Besides the passages from *De an.* 3.9–10 quoted below, see also e.g. *NE* 10.7.1177b1–26.

be avoided and pursued, while movement always belongs to one who is avoiding or pursuing something' (*De an.* 3.9.432b27–29), whereas the *nous* that moves is that which reasons for the sake of something and is practical, and 'it differs from the contemplative intellect in respect of its end' (*De an.* 3.10.433a14–15).⁸ Practical *nous* concerns things that can be otherwise (see *NE* 6.1.1139a6–11), but this means that it can be both right *and* wrong.⁹ So if, in our passage (433a26–29), Aristotle is referring to *nous* in the same sense as he did in the preceding lines (433a22–26), he would contradict himself: *nous*, in this sense, is decidedly *not* 'always right'.

Advocates of the interpretation under consideration have noticed this difficulty and tried to explain it. Hamlyn's response is to say that Aristotle is engaged in 'characteristic exaggeration' (1993: 152). But this is unsatisfactory (and in fact rather 'characteristic' of Hamlyn). Irwin more reasonably suggests that in claiming that *nous* is always correct, while desire and phantasia are not, 'Aristotle presumably intends *nous* more narrowly than *logismos*, since he does not say that *logismos* is always correct' (1988: 596n.8). Irwin's suggestion is that 'correct reasoning', which he equates with *nous*, 'presumably finds the actual good, and incorrect reasoning or appearance finds only the apparent good' (1988: 596n.8).¹⁰ But this seems somewhat ad hoc (the inference seems to be: 'since *nous* in the *logismos* sense is not always right, Aristotle must, when he unexpectedly states that *nous* is always right in 433a26, mean to refer to correct practical reasoning by *nous*'), and to leave Aristotle saying something rather trite: 'correct reasoning is always correct, and incorrect reasoning is incorrect'. Moss (2009: 128n.23) instead suggests that at 433a26 *nous* can be said to be always correct because practical *nous* is 'without qualification'

⁸ Cf. *NE* 6.1.1139a5–15, and see Anscombe (1957: 59–60) for some criticism.

⁹ Hence *NE* 6.2.1139a23–24 states that for virtue 'both the reasoning must be true and the desire right' (which assumes that practical reasoning *can* be false and that the desire *can* be wrong, although practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) is the state that gets both these right); cf. *Int.* 1.16a9–11, *De an.* 3.6.430a26–430b6, *Metaph.* Θ.10.1051b2–17, etc.

¹⁰ It is odd that Irwin here discusses what Aristotle means in claiming that *nous* is always correct while phantasia and orexis are both correct and incorrect without seeing that these lines dictate that 'apparent good', in what immediately follows, must refer to things appearing *as* good.

correct, even though in particular cases it will get things wrong. With this she has in mind Aristotle's account of *boulêsis* in *NE* 3.4 (discussed in §3 below), where we are told that *boulêsis* is without qualification for the good (and is so for the virtuous agent), but for each person for the apparent good. On this view, in saying that *nous* is always right, Aristotle is picking out the *nous* of the correct agent. But even if this might account for the point at hand, there is yet another problem with the general interpretation we are considering.

As mentioned, commentators who advocate this reading take Aristotle to be aligning *nous* with real goods and *phantasia* with apparent goods. But Aristotle does not claim: '*nous* is always correct, whereas *phantasia* is both correct and incorrect'. Rather crucially, he actually writes '*nous* is always correct, but *orexis* and *phantasia* are both correct and incorrect' (my emphasis). The fact that *orexis* is included in the second clause is ignored by advocates of the interpretation under consideration, but it too is something they ought to explain since it would suggest (on their general view) that *nous* lines up with real goods, while *phantasia* and *orexis* line up with apparent goods. And yet this would be rather odd given that the reference to *nous* and *phantasia* was meant to be explaining, on their interpretation, two different ways we can grasp the *orekton*, the object of *orexis*.

Is there an alternative to this interpretation that can deal with these problems? I believe there is. It is well known that Aristotle holds the view that there is a certain type of intellectual grasping or understanding (*nous*), concerning theoretically simple entities, that cannot be in error (so too for a certain type of basic perceiving); one either grasps the item under consideration or is ignorant of it.¹¹ Suppose that *nous* at 433a26 does not pick up the practical *nous* that Aristotle has been referring to in the immediately preceding lines, but the theoretical *nous* that cannot be in error, which he seems to refer to at the end of 3.9 (432b27–28) and at

¹¹ See esp. *Metaph.* Θ.10.1051b17–1052a11, *De an.* 3.6.430b26–30; cf. e.g. *An. post.* 2.19.100b5–17, *NE* 6.1.1139a5–15, *NE* 6.7.1141a9–20. For discussion of the claim that with the grasping of such things error or falsehood is impossible, see Pearson (2005: Part 2). See also especially Burnyeat (2008) on this notion of *nous*, and how it ought best to be translated (i.e. 'intellect' for *nous*, and 'understand' for the verb *noein*).

the beginning of 3.10 (433a14–15). Then, in 433a26–27, he would be contrasting theoretical *nous*, which is always correct (because error is impossible with it), with *orexis* and *phantasia*, which can be both correct and incorrect. And his subsequent point would then be that since *orexis* and *phantasia* can be both correct and incorrect, the *orekton* need only be the apparent good, not the real good.

Although it is clear on this reading why Aristotle would refer to *orexis* in 433a26–27, one might now wonder why he would refer to *phantasia*: could he not have drawn his contrast without mentioning that at all? Perhaps, but the reference to *phantasia* is intelligible in light of the fact that in *De an.* 3.10 Aristotle highlights that all (voluntary) locomotion requires *phantasia*, as we investigated in the last chapter (§2). Given this, ‘*orexis* and *phantasia*’ in 433a26–27 makes sense, since Aristotle could mean: ‘but *orexis* and – more generally – *phantasia* are both right and wrong’, or: ‘but *orexis*, and *phantasia* – which is required for *orexis* – are both right and wrong’, or some such. On this view, then, the *orekton* is the good *or* the apparent good because *orexis* and *phantasia* can be either right *or* wrong.

At any rate, whether we adopt my reading of the inference in 433a26–29 or follow the standard one, it seems clear that the introduction of ‘apparent good’ pertains to the possibility of error and so must refer to things appearing *as* good even when they fail to be such, and hence *not*, as Irwin suggested, to ‘the good that appears’. This of course means that we are still left with the worry that Aristotle’s specification of the *orekton* in *De an.* 3.10 entails that he thinks that animals can desire things *as* good. P1 has yet to be solved.

2. Two notions of ‘good’: broad and narrow

In addressing P1, the first thing to consider is what was deemed to be so objectionable about the view that animals can desire things *as* good. Irwin (1988: 332) claims that this is something that Aristotle denies elsewhere since ‘normally he says that an animal is moved to action by the appearance that something is pleasant’ and ‘distinguishes the appetite [= *epithumia*] that animals have

from the wish [= *boulêsis*] that only rational agents have by saying that appetite is for the pleasant and wish is for the good' (citing *De an.* 2.3.414b2–6, *Pol.* 1.2.1253a15–18). If *boulêsis* is for the good and *epithumia* is for the pleasant, and if animals cannot possess the former, then clearly animals cannot desire things as good. Irwin's reading has not gone unchallenged. Richardson (1992: 395) meets it with 'a concession and a distinction'. He concedes that non-reasoning animals lack any 'general supposition (*hupolêpsis katholou*)' about the good – this being a simple consequence of the fact that such creatures lack general suppositions altogether (citing *Metaph.* A. 1.981a7, *NE* 7.3.1147b3–5). But Richardson thinks that nonetheless Aristotle's natural teleology 'gives us a way to understand the good of an organism and the place of pleasure and survival in its good without having to suppose that the animal has any general supposition about it' (1992: 395). On Richardson's view, animals that are unable to have general suppositions 'could still have phantasmata of objects of desire as good', and in fact they need to be able to do so 'because the content of propositions about the local good is essential to the account of their particular movements' (1992: 395). In turn, one suspects that Irwin would still consider this 'grasping of the content of *propositions* about their good' too complex a task for non-rational animals.

I believe, however, that in spite of their opposing readings, both Irwin and Richardson share a common misapprehension that prevents them from grasping Aristotle's actual view. They both seem to accept that when Aristotle claims the *orekton* is the good or apparent good he must mean the same thing by 'good' as he does when he connects the *boulêton* to the good. This results in Irwin wishing to deny that non-rational creatures can desire things as good, and prompts him to provide his alternative account of 'the apparent good' that we considered in §1. But it also seems implicit in Richardson's response to Irwin in so far as that reply involves drawing a distinction between having a general supposition of the good and having a *phantasia* of the good, and maintaining that while non-rational animals are restricted to the latter their rational cousins can also accomplish the former. For although the difference between rational and non-rational creatures would no doubt mean that certain aspects

of ‘the good’ would be available to rational animals that are not available to non-rational ones, it nevertheless seems to be the case that the same signification of ‘good’ is in play.

But this is highly problematic, as can be seen if we recall P2. Aristotle seems to think both that psychic capacities are distinguished first and foremost by their objects (see [Chapter 2](#), introduction), and also that orexis is the genus of which epithumia, thumos and boulêsis are the species. But the combination of these points entails that boulêsis and orexis cannot have the same correlative objects. Instead, the boulêton must only pick out *part of* the orekton. The upshot is that when Aristotle connects both the orekton and the boulêton to the good, he must be using ‘good’ in *two different significations*, a narrow notion attaching to boulêsis, and a broader notion attaching to orexis.

In connecting boulêsis to the good and epithumia to the pleasant Aristotle appears to follow Plato (see *Charmides* 167e1–5). What Aristotle supplies in addition, of course, as we discussed in [Chapter 1](#), is the notion that orexis is the genus of these desires (and of thumos in addition). Given this, we should find him claiming that boulêsis is orexis for the good and epithumia is orexis for the pleasant. And indeed we do. In *Topics* 6.8, Aristotle gives boulêsis as an example of a relative term (*pros ti*), and claims that, as such, it is correctly defined in terms of its object, to which it is relationally tied (146a36–146b2). It should not, we are told, be defined as ‘painless orexis’ – in so far as that fails to mention the term to which it is relative – but as ‘orexis for the good’ (146b5–6, also 146b37–147a1). So too, in *Rhetoric* 1.11, Aristotle portrays epithumia and pleasure as correlatives – ‘everything is pleasant for which there is an epithumia’ – and then adds: ‘for epithumia is orexis for the pleasant’ (1370a16–18, also *Top.* 6.8.147a1, *De an.* 2.3.14b5–6). But if Aristotle thinks that boulêsis is orexis for the good and epithumia is orexis for the pleasant, he cannot also hold that orexis is for the good in the same sense as boulêsis is. For this would make orexis and boulêsis signify the same thing, and so would make it a tautology that boulêsis is orexis for the good, since all orexis would be for the good (but Aristotle does not appear to treat this as a tautology), and would make it false to claim that epithumia is orexis for the pleasant, since all orexis

would be for the good not the pleasant. Instead, Aristotle must mean: orexis is for the good in a broad sense which includes both good in a narrow sense (pertaining to *boulêsis*) and also pleasure (the object of *epithumia*). Then his claims concur: *boulêsis* is orexis for the good in the narrow sense; *epithumia* is orexis for the pleasant; both *boulêsis* and *epithumia* are species of orexis, and orexis is for the good in a broad sense which includes both the good in the narrow sense and pleasure, and, indeed, the object of *thumos* in addition.¹²

The narrow notion of good can also be seen in Aristotle's account of akratic action. Consider the following passages from *NE* 5.9 and *NE* 9.4:

[the akratic] acts against his *boulêsis*. For no one has *boulêseis* for (*boulesthai*) what he does not think to be good (*spoudaion*); but the akratic does enact things that he thinks he should not. (1136b6–9)

[bad people (*phauloi*)] are at odds with themselves, and they have *epithumiai* for (*epithumein*) some things and *boulêseis* for (*boulesthai*) others, e.g. akratic people. They choose, instead of the things they themselves think good, things that are pleasant but hurtful. (1166b6–10)

The akratic agent intentionally acts contrary to what he thinks to be good. Instead of choosing to do things he has a *boulêsis* for, and so thinks good, he elects to do those things that appear pleasant to him, i.e. that he has an *epithumia* for. In this way he acts in a manner that he thinks that he should not. According to the second passage, things can be pleasant yet not good (but instead hurtful or disadvantageous (*blabera*)). Aristotle clearly thinks that we can distinguish *boulêsis* from his other desires by reference to its connection to the good and this obviously means that he must have a different, narrower, notion of 'good' in play than that in which all orexeis are connected to the good.

There is also additional evidence of the broad notion of 'good' that attaches to orexis, besides the considerations already adduced. In *De motu animalium* Aristotle again asserts that *boulêsis*, *thumos*

¹² Of course, Aristotle also claims that *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational, whereas *boulêsis* is rational, but this is clearly not sufficient to distinguish his three desires: *epithumia* and *thumos* must themselves be distinguished by some other feature since they both stem from the non-rational part of the soul.

and epithumia are all forms of orexis. He then notes that the first mover is the object of desire (the orekton) or the object of practical thought (the *prakton dianoêton*) and identifies this object as the good (6.700b25–26). But he then writes: ‘and we must suppose that the apparent good ranks as a good, and so does the pleasant (since it is an apparent good)’ (700b28–29). I shall consider below what Aristotle means in claiming that pleasure is an apparent good (rather than, say, ‘either a good or an apparent good’), but for now the key point is that the notion of ‘good’ employed here *explicitly* includes pleasure (since it is an apparent good, and ‘good’ here is said to include the apparent good). Therefore, this notion of ‘good’, which specifies the orekton, is broader than the narrow notion expressed in the passages just mentioned. On this broad notion of ‘good’, the akratic would be performing an action he took to be *good* (because pleasure ‘ranks as a good’), and so we would not have the good/pleasure contrast that is required in that context.

The notion that Aristotle thinks that there are two different specifications of ‘good’, one which includes pleasure (and also the object of thumos), and one which does not, solves in one go both the problems I sketched in the introduction to this chapter. First, in the signification of ‘good’ that picks out the orekton, animals can desire things *as* good because this signification includes pleasure, and so can simply refer to them desiring things *as* pleasant (or *for* the end of thumos). Stating that the orekton is the (apparent) good thus does not require non-rational animals to desire things *as* good in the signification of ‘good’ which picks out the boulêton, and so would be consistent with their not being able to desire things *as* good in this signification, if, say, that required rational judgement. This solves P1. Second, given that ‘good’, when it picks out the orekton, signifies something broader than when it specifies the boulêton, we no longer have the problem of the genus of desire (orexis) having the same object as one of its species (boulêsis). This solves P2.

Let me close this section by addressing a passage that may seem to be in tension with my reading. In *De an.* 3.10, Aristotle claims:

(a) orexeis arise which are opposed to each other, and this happens when reason (*logos*) and epithumiai are opposed and it takes place in creatures which have a perception of time (for (b) *nous* bids us resist on account of the future, while (c) our

epithumiai bid us act on account of what is immediate; for (d) what is immediately pleasant seems both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good because (e) the creature does not see the future). (433b5–10, letters inserted)

Epithumia bids us to act on account of what is immediate (= c), i.e. presumably immediately pleasant, and what is immediately pleasant appears both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good (= d). But then it might seem that epithumia involves things appearing both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good. Of course, if ‘good’ were being used here in the broad sense, it would follow as a matter of course that what appears pleasant also appears good, since something’s appearing pleasant is just one way in which it can appear good in the broad sense of ‘good’. But it is perhaps more plausible that Aristotle means ‘good’ in a narrow sense in (d), since otherwise ‘and absolutely good’ would add nothing of substance to ‘absolutely pleasant’. If so, the passage would seem problematic for my interpretation, for it would suggest that the object of epithumia can be both something pleasant and also something good in the narrow sense; whereas I claimed that Aristotle distinguishes epithumia from *boulêsis* on the ground that the former is for pleasure whereas the latter is for good in the narrow sense.

But in fact the passage does not conflict with my reading. This is because if Aristotle means ‘good’ in the narrow sense, then ‘seems both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good’ in (d) would be highly unlikely to be intended to specify the content of the animal’s mental states (in spite of the fact that Aristotle begins the clause with the word ‘seems’). For one thing, having something appear as absolutely pleasant (*haplôs hêdu*) or absolutely good (*agathon haplôs*), in this context, seems to imply a comparative judgement (‘this is pleasant/good absolutely, not just to me’) that is beyond the capacity of a creature that lacks even the perception of time, but (e) states that the creature under consideration is one that does not see (i.e. anticipate) the future. Second, having something appear ‘good’ in a narrow sense might itself seem to require reason, and reason seems to be denied to creatures that lack perception of time (hence (a)–(c)). Third, if the creature has access to two different evaluative spheres, pleasure and good, then one might well think that it *would* be able to have conflicting desires;

whereas in (d) and (e) Aristotle is explaining why the creature in question is unable to do so.

So what does 'seems both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good' in (d) refer to? The alternative is that the phrase is an objective assessment of the creature's evaluations or, as we might also put it, the phrase must be understood *de re*, not *de dicto*. That is, Aristotle is referring to the fact that the immediately pleasant object is, for these creatures, treated as something that, *in us*, would have the significance of appearing both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good. When considered from this perspective, Aristotle's point in fact makes ready sense. For creatures that lack the perception of time, what is immediately encountered takes on the appearance of something that for us need not be compelling because we can see the future. Since they cannot see the future, there is no way in which they can see that what appears immediately pleasant might need to be resisted (even for a greater pleasure in the near future): *nous* cannot impact on their picture of reality, and so cannot tell them that what appears immediately pleasant should not be pursued. This suggests that (d) does not mean that what is immediately pleasant to creatures that lack the perception of time literally appears both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good to them. Instead, (d) means that what is immediately pleasant for these creatures *has the force* of something that would be absolutely pleasant and absolutely good *for us*. These creatures lack access to judgements about what is absolutely pleasant or good, but if we translate their encounters with something immediately pleasant into our psychological framework it would be as if the object appeared both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good. And since such creatures lack the perception of time, it is necessary that each object that appears immediately pleasant to them take on this force. For, on Aristotle's view, having conflicting desires, and so different evaluative perspectives, requires the perception of time.

3. What does Aristotle mean by 'apparent good'?

We have seen (in §1) that Aristotle seems to introduce the notion of the apparent good, in *De an.* 3.10, to account for cases of error:

in so far as the agent might be in error, the orekton need only be for the apparent good, not the real good. Given this, one might think that by ‘apparent good’ Aristotle means: ‘something that appears good, even though it is in fact not good’. But if *this* were what he meant by ‘apparent good’ then the claim that we have just seen him make in *De motu an.* 6 – that pleasure is an apparent good – would be problematic. For Aristotle would then in effect be claiming that pleasure is something that appears good even though it is not in fact good. Yet elsewhere he argues at length that pleasure should not be considered intrinsically bad (e.g. *NE* 7.13–14 and 10.3). In the present section I shall address this problem.

(a) *EE* 7.2

There is an interesting discussion in *EE* 7.2, in which Aristotle again asserts that pleasure is an orekton because it is an apparent good. This text shall also prove interesting to us in some other respects, so let us consider it in detail. It occurs near the beginning of the *EE* discussion of friendship, where Aristotle is considering the object of love or affection (*philoumenon*) and some other related issues. The relevant part begins:

(a) Another puzzle is whether the good or the pleasant is the object of love. For if we love what we have an epithumia for – and love is of this kind, for ‘none is a lover but one who ever loves’ – and if epithumia is for the pleasant, in this way the object of love would be the pleasant; but if it is what we have a boulêsis for, then it is the good – the good and the pleasant being different. About all these and the other cognate questions we must attempt to gain clear distinctions, starting from the following principle. (b) The orekton and the boulêton is either the good or the apparent good. (c) Now this is why the pleasant is an orekton, for it is an apparent good; (d) for some think it such, and to some it appears such, though they do not think it such (*tois men gar dokei, tois de phainetai kan mê dokêi*). (e) For phantasia and doxa do not reside in the same part of the soul. (f) It is clear, then, that we love both the good and the pleasant. (7.2.1235b18–30, letters inserted)

The puzzle (*aporia*) concerns whether the good or the pleasant is the object of love. Aristotle’s answer, in (f), is that we love both the good and the pleasant. The puzzle is set up, in (a), by noting that if we love what we have an epithumia for, and epithumia is for the pleasant, then the object of love would be the pleasant, whereas if we love what we have a boulêsis for, and boulêsis is

for the good, then the object of love would be the good. Aristotle's reasoning in the resolution is a little compressed but, spelt out, his thought seems to be: since (1) both the *boulêton* (the good) and the *epithumêton* (the pleasant) are *orekta*, objects of desire in the broadest sense, and (2) what is an object of desire in the broadest sense is an object of love or affection in some way, then (3) we love both the good and the pleasant. (2) is left unstated, (3) is the conclusion asserted in (f), but it is (1), which is established in (b) and (c), that is of most interest to us. (b) claims that the *orekton* and the *boulêton* is the good or apparent good; (c) adds that pleasure is also an *orekton*, for it is apparent good. Since we here have a sense in which both *epithumia* and *boulêsis* aim at the (apparent) good, given our argument of the last section Aristotle must have in mind the broad notion of 'good' in which all *orexeis* aim at the good. (d) is tricky, but it can be made consistent with what has so far been established if it is read as follows: 'to some what is pleasant is thought good, while to some what is pleasant appears good, but is not thought good'. As I understand this, Aristotle is not referring to a thought with the content *that the pleasant is good*, or to a *phantasia* with the content *that the pleasant appears good* (which would be problematic if 'good' is being employed in the broad sense); he is instead stating that things that are pleasant can be either thought good, or appear good without being thought good, where 'good' refers throughout to the broad notion of good in which pleasure is an *orekton*.¹³ (e) explains that the independence of thought from what appears to us stems from the independence of *phantasia* and *doxa* in the soul.¹⁴

Here again, then, i.e. in addition to *De motu an.* 6, Aristotle refers to pleasure (which is here explicitly said to be the object of

¹³ So something's being an apparent good, on my view, does not necessitate that it is grasped by *phantasia*, contra Moss (2009: e.g. 128). Those for whom what is pleasant appears good, but is not thought so, may refer to *akratia*/*enkratia*, in which case what appears good (*sub specie* pleasure), will also be thought bad (*sub specie* the narrow notion of bad that corresponds to the narrow notion of good that is the object of *boulêsis*), or it may simply refer to agents who do not have a thought about the thing in question, but just an appearance, or, indeed, non-rational animals who are incapable of having thoughts in general.

¹⁴ Aristotle is here emphasising his terminology (cf. *De an.* 3.3.428a18–b9), since in ordinary Greek *dokein* (cum inf.) and *phainesthai* (cum inf.) mean the same thing, i.e. *seem*.

epithumia) as an orekton because it is an apparent good. However, in the very next chunk of *EE* 7.2, having asserted that the previous puzzle is settled (1235b30), Aristotle claims that we ‘must make another assumption’, and continues:

(g) Of the good, some is absolutely (*haplôs*) good, some good to a particular man (*tini*), though not absolutely; (h) and the same things are at once absolutely good and absolutely pleasant. (i) For we say that what is advantageous to a body in health is absolutely good for a body, but not what is good for a sick body, such as drugs and the knife. (j) Similarly, things absolutely pleasant to a body are those pleasant to a healthy and unaffected body, e.g. seeing in light, not in darkness, though the opposite is the case to one with ophthalmia. (k) And the pleasanter wine is not that which is pleasant to one whose tongue has been spoilt by inebriety (for they add vinegar to it), but that which is pleasant to sensation unspoiled. (l) So with the soul; what is pleasant not to children or brutes, but to the adult, is really pleasant; at least, when we remember both we choose the latter. (m) And as the child or brute is to the adult man, so are the bad and foolish (*aphrôn*) to the good and practically wise (*phronimon*). To these, that which suits their habit is pleasant, and that is the good and noble. (1235b31–1236a7, letters inserted)

(g) may seem to claim that something will count as being good to a particular man only if it is not good absolutely, but if taken this way then in fact the division in (g) is not exhaustive.¹⁵ This can be seen by looking at the remainder of the passage. What is good (or pleasant) absolutely *is* good *tini*, for a particular person, namely, the person in the right condition (healthy, sober, grown-up, virtuous, etc.). Thus it is not the case that if something is good for a particular man it is not good absolutely; rather, whether what is good for a particular man is good absolutely depends on who you appraise. (h) claims that the same things are at once absolutely good and absolutely pleasant. (i) claims that what is absolutely good for a body is so for a healthy body, thereby supporting (g), at least with respect to the body. (j) and (k) support the notion that what is absolutely pleasant is so for a healthy or sober body. (Technically, these do not support (h), but only a pleasure version of (g).) (l) applies the thought in (j) and (k) to ‘the soul’ and states that what is absolutely pleasant is what is pleasant for grown-ups rather than children or animals. (m) extends (l): what is absolutely

¹⁵ One could instead claim that ‘good absolutely’ should be understood as: ‘good absolutely whether it is good to a particular person or not’, and then the division would be exhaustive.

pleasant is what is pleasant to the fully virtuous practically wise agent. With (l) we are also told that what is absolutely pleasant is also ‘the good and noble’. Presumably this means that what is absolutely pleasant for the virtuous agent is also absolutely good. Here finally, then, we get the required case in which (h) is true, i.e. the same things are at once absolutely good and absolutely pleasant. But although this is the only point at which (h) seems to be addressed explicitly, presumably Aristotle also thinks that what is absolutely good for a body is what is absolutely pleasant for it, so that what is good for a healthy body is pleasant for a healthy body, and vice versa.¹⁶ Most significant for us, though, is his clear contention that what is absolutely pleasant is absolutely good.

Now return to the problem raised at the beginning of this section. If by ‘apparent good’ Aristotle means ‘what appears good, even though it in fact is not’, the claim (in *De motu an.* 6 and *EE* 7.2) that pleasure is an apparent good seems problematic. That claim would entail that pleasure is something that appears good, even though it is not in fact good, and yet, as mentioned, Aristotle denies this elsewhere. We can now see, in addition, that this is something that Aristotle appears to deny in a passage *that immediately follows* one of those in which he claims that pleasure is an apparent good. Perhaps, then, we should take this dissonance to suggest that by ‘apparent good’ Aristotle does not mean ‘what appears good, even though it in fact is not’?

However, the situation is actually a bit more complicated. Shortly after the passage last quoted, Aristotle claims:

... the pleasant is in part absolutely pleasant and absolutely good, and in part pleasant to a particular individual (*tini*) and apparently good (*phainomenon agathon*) ... (1236a9–10)

This suggests that the position in the earlier passage that pleasure is an apparent good has been modified in the light of the subsequent

¹⁶ Can the two, bodily pleasures/goods and soul pleasures/goods, come apart? Clearly the former can be possessed without the latter, since non-rational animals cannot possess virtues, or at least not in the strict sense (*NE* 6.13.1144b1–30). But whether the latter can be possessed without the former will depend on whether we think unhealthy people can nevertheless be virtuous. This is perhaps unlikely for Aristotle since being reasonably healthy is probably a requirement for temperance, at least, and Aristotle subscribes to a version of the unity of virtues thesis (*NE* 6.13.1144b32–1145a2).

discussion – we are now told that in fact pleasure can count *both* as an apparent good *and also* as an absolute good. And yet, rather crucially, although this does indeed seem to be the case, it actually does not support the notion that by ‘apparent good’ Aristotle means ‘what appears good, even though it in fact is not’. This is because something’s being apparently good is in these lines tied to the fact that the thing is pleasant to a particular person (‘in part pleasant to a particular individual and apparently good’). But we have seen that what is good or pleasant absolutely *is* in fact what is good or pleasant to a particular person, namely, the healthy or virtuous person. If so, what is pleasant to such a person is *both* an apparent good *and also* what is absolutely good. Given this, ‘apparent good’ should not mean ‘what appears good, even though it in fact is not’ since sometimes what appears good will actually be what is in fact good. Instead ‘apparent good’ needs to signify something weaker; something like: ‘what appears good, even *if* it in fact is not good’.¹⁷

(b) *NE* 3.4

Such a signification can be found explicitly in *NE* 3.4. In this chapter, Aristotle is considering whether the *boulêton* should be characterised as the good or the apparent good. But although the

¹⁷ The same conclusion can be reached from a related passage, this time concerning what is fearful: ‘Perhaps we use “frightening” (*phoberon*) – like “pleasant” and “good” in two senses. Some things are pleasant and good absolutely, whereas others are so to a particular person but absolutely are bad and unpleasant – e.g. what is useful to the wicked, or pleasant to children as such; and similarly the frightening is either absolutely such or such to a particular person. What, then, a coward as such fears is not frightening to anyone or but slightly so, but what is frightening to the majority of men or to human nature, that we call absolutely frightening. But the courageous man behaves fearlessly (*aphobôs*) towards these things and endures such things, they being to him frightening in one sense but not in another – frightening to him *qua* man, but not frightening to him except slightly so, or not at all, *qua* courageous’ (*EE* 3.1.1228b17–29, for discussion see Heil (1996)). Again, if Aristotle’s division at the start of the passage is taken to mean that something will count as being fearful to a particular man only if it is not frightening absolutely, then it would not be exhaustive: what appears frightening to the courageous man (*qua* man) is not only frightening to a particular person (him) but also frightening absolutely. (Courage is manifested by the fact that even though the courageous agent is afraid (*qua* man) he nevertheless stands firm and shows himself fearless *qua* courageous. See also [Chapter 9](#) below.)

discussion concerns the *boulêton*, not the *orekton*, the key point is exactly parallel. Aristotle writes:

That *boulêsis* is for the end (*telos*) has already been stated; some think it is for the good, others for the apparent good. Now (1) those who say that the good is the *boulêton*, must admit that that which the man who does not choose aright (*ho mê orthôs hairoumenos*) has a *boulêsis* for is not a *boulêton*; for if it is to be so, it must be good; but it was, if it so happened, bad; while (2) those who say the apparent good is the *boulêton* must admit that there is no natural *boulêton*, but only what seems so to each man. Now different things appear so to different people, and if it so happens, even contrary things. (1113a15–22, numbers inserted)

The argument of (1), a *reductio* claimed by one group, can, I think, be spelt out as follows:

- (i) The good is the *boulêton* [ex hypothesi];
- (ii) sometimes an agent does not choose correctly, and when he does not do so, he chooses what is bad, not what is good [premise];
- (iii) an agent who chooses a course of action has a *boulêsis* to perform that action [premise];
- so (iv) the agent referred to in (ii) has a *boulêsis* that is not for a *boulêton* [from (i), (ii) and (iii); i.e. if the *boulêsis* the agent in (ii) possesses were for a *boulêton*, then his *boulêsis* would be for the good (from (i)), but he has chosen something bad (= ii), and so has a *boulêsis* for something that is bad (from (ii) and (iii))].
- (v) The result in (iv) is unpalatable (1113a23) [presumably because it is built into the meaning of *boulêsis* (and *boul-esthai*) that its object is the *boulêton*];
- so (vi) we should deny that the *boulêton* is the good (that is, deny premise (i)) [from (v) – assuming that (i) was the only controversial premise in the set].

Clearly, this argument only works if ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in (i) and (ii) pick out something that is in fact genuinely good or bad. If ‘good’ instead picked out ‘what appears good to the agent’ and ‘bad’ ‘what appears bad to the agent’, then it would not follow that someone who chooses incorrectly chooses something that is bad (= appears bad), for someone might choose incorrectly owing to

his selecting something that is good (= appears good), but in fact fails to be good.

The argument in (2), another *reductio*, promoted by another group, can be spelt out as follows:

- (i') The apparent good is the *boulêton* [ex hypothesi];
- (ii') different things appear good to different people, even contrary things [premise];
- so (iii') there is no natural *boulêton*, but only what appears so to each man [from (i') and (ii')];
- but (iv') the result in (iii') is unpalatable (1113a23);
- so (v') we should deny premise (i') [from (iv') – assuming that (i') was the controversial premise].

Here, 'apparent good' seems to pick out 'what it is that appears good to the agent'. Aristotle's problem with the view that the apparent good is the *boulêton* is that there would then seem to be no natural or correct thing to have as one's *boulêton*; for we can be mistaken about what is in fact good.

Argument (1), then, undermines identifying the good as the *boulêton*, and argument (2) undermines identifying the apparent good as the *boulêton*. Aristotle's resolution to this impasse is provided in the form a hypothetical question:

If these consequences are unpleasing, are we to say that absolutely and in truth the good is the *boulêton*, but for each person the apparent good; that that which is in truth a *boulêton* is a *boulêton* to the good man, while any chance thing may be so to the bad man (as in the case of bodies also the things that are in truth wholesome are wholesome for bodies which are in good condition, while for those that are diseased other things are wholesome – or bitter or sweet or hot or heavy, and so on), since the good man judges each class of things rightly, and in each the truth appears to him? For each state of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and the measure of them. (1113a22–33)

We are surely meant to take this to be Aristotle's view (he then goes on to offer an explanation of the error, which I consider below). The basic suggestion is that we can escape argument (1) by insisting that for each person the apparent good is the *boulêton*, and yet still manage to escape argument (2) by maintaining that nevertheless a natural and correct *boulêton* does exist, since this

is what appears good to the good man ('in each class of things the truth *appears* to him'). Thus, for each man the *boulêton* is the apparent good, what appears good to him, but in the case of the virtuous agent what appears good to him will be what is in fact good 'absolutely and in truth'.

In *NE* 3.4, then, 'apparent good' does not mean: 'what appears good, even though it in fact is not'. Since the truth appears to the virtuous person, what *is* good *appears* good to him. Thus, we can say that both virtuous and vicious agents encounter apparent goods – it is just that what appears good to the virtuous agent is in fact good. 'Apparent good', in this context, refers to: 'what appears good, even *if* it in fact is not'.¹⁸

Although in *NE* 3.4 Aristotle is concerned with the *boulêton* (and hence the narrow notion of 'good'), his resolution to the problem can be taken to apply *mutatis mutandis* to the *orekton* as well. The changes that are necessary to transport us from the *boulêton* to the *orekton* can be seen if we consider the final lines of *NE* 3.4. Aristotle writes:

In most things the error seems to be due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not. We therefore choose the pleasant as a good and avoid pain as an evil. (1113a33–1113b2)

NE 3.4 is concerned with the *boulêton*, and this can be identified with a narrow notion of good that excludes pleasure (and also the object of *thumos*). So when Aristotle claims here that if we are motivated by a *boulêton* which is not actually good, the error is (most often) due to pleasure, owing to it appearing good when it is not, he must mean 'good' in the narrow sense which excludes pleasure. This might sound paradoxical. Is Aristotle not claiming that pleasure appears good? If so, how can he be using 'good' in a sense which excludes pleasure? But in fact such exclusion is

¹⁸ It might appear that Aristotle does not always mean this by 'apparent good'. In *EE* 2.10, for example, he claims: 'The end (*telos*) is always something good by nature, and men deliberate about its partial constituents, e.g. the doctor whether he is to give a drug, or the general where he is to pitch his camp. To them the absolutely best end is good. But contrary to nature and by perversion not the good but the apparent good is the end' (1227a18–22). I suppose some might read this as implying that apparent goods pick out things that are actually bad. But this would be a mistake: the fact that if something is bad, and yet desired, it must only be an apparent good, does not imply that if something is an apparent good, it must be bad.

required for him to make the point he is seeking to make. Aristotle claims that the error results from us choosing the pleasant *as* (*hōs*) good and avoiding pain *as* evil. But in the sense in which pleasure is an orekton, pleasure *simply is* one way in which things appear good. It thus cannot be singled out and selected *as* good, in the broad sense of ‘good’, for that would be tantamount to selecting the good as good, which is palpably not what Aristotle has in mind. What he actually has in mind are people who, deceived by pleasure, treat pleasure as good in the narrow sense of ‘good’, that is, people who treat pleasure as the right thing to pursue in one’s life, or some such. For these people, what appears pleasant, and so is an object of epithumia, is pursued as good in the narrow sense, i.e. is made into their boulêton as well (see also *EE* 2.10.1227a39–40).¹⁹

(c) *Verdict*

What, then, does Aristotle mean in *De an.* 3.10 when he claims that the orekton is the good *or apparent good*? The argument of this section suggests the following answer: the orekton is what is good (in the broad sense) absolutely, or *what appears good* (in the broad sense) *to someone, whether it is good absolutely or not*. For the perfect agent, no less than the most imperfect agent, the orekton is what appears good to him. It is just that for the perfect agent what appears good is good absolutely, and so for him the orekton can also just simply be said to be the good.

¹⁹ In *Metaph.* Λ.7.1072a27–28 Aristotle claims: ‘what is apparently noble (*to phainomenon kalon*) is the epithumêton, but what is really noble (*to on kalon*) is the primary (or “highest”, “first”: *prôton*) boulêton’. The passage in which this line is embedded is very difficult, and I hope to consider it in greater detail on a subsequent occasion. But clearly the line itself does not contradict *NE* 3.4 or *EE* 7.2, since the fact that the *prôton* boulêton is what is really noble is consistent with the claim that the boulêton for each man is the apparent good, and the fact that the epithumêton is what is apparently noble does not rule out that it can also in fact be genuinely noble, e.g. when the thing in question appears pleasurable to the virtuous agent. (Hence Aristotle claims that in the temperate agent the epithumêtikon ‘harmonises with reason, for the noble is the mark at which both aim’ (3.12.1119b16). For more discussion of this, and the different ways in which reason and the epithumêtikon ‘aim’ at reason, see [Chapter 4](#), §3) Nevertheless, the Λ.7 passage does seem to seek to prioritise boulêsis over epithumia in a way that warrants further investigation.

4. What sort of error is being referred to?

One might think that apparent goods are apparent because when one brings about the object of desire one may in fact fail to bring about the envisaged good (for a variety of reasons). Suppose, for example, Beth forms a desire to eat an apple she sees in front of her because she believes it would be pleasurable to eat but, when she bites into the apple, she discovers that it is actually rotten inside; indeed, there is a big, fat worm running through it. It is thus not pleasant at all. In such a case, we shall still presumably want to say that Beth was motivated by the prospect of an object of desire, albeit one that in this case failed to deliver. And so we might say that the object of desire was just an apparent good, not a real good. On this view, apparent goods are apparent when Φ -ing appears good in respect c but are not encountered as good in respect c when one actually Φ s.

Although this characterisation might seem to fit my specification of the apparent good as ‘what appears good, even if it in fact is not’, it is not actually what Aristotle had in mind, as can be seen from the *EE* 7.2 and *NE* 3.4 passages we have just looked at. The examples mentioned in the *EE* 7.2 passage all involve agents actually experiencing their envisaged pleasures, and this seems to be the case with the *NE* 3.4 passage as well if the parenthetical parallel of diseased and healthy bodies is meant to be applied to the case at hand (see the resolution passage). Those examples suggest instead the following account: apparent goods are apparent because when I bring about the object of desire, although this does indeed bring about the envisaged result, the thing I get may not actually be good for me, but only appear to be so. Suppose, for example, I form a desire to smoke a cigarette because I believe that would be pleasurable. I find a cigarette, smoke it, and it is indeed pleasurable in just the respect in which I desired it. One might still think that, in such a case, the object of desire is only apparently good for me, not a real good, since smoking is harmful to my health.²⁰

²⁰ It might seem that two different kinds of case are picked up here. Whereas something can appear as though it would be healthy, be encountered as seeming healthy, but not in fact be healthy, it is not so clear that something can appear as though it would be pleasant, be encountered as pleasant, but not in fact be pleasant. But the latter is possible, for

If this is what Aristotle means by ‘apparent good’ then how would he characterise Beth’s experience with the rotten apple? I suspect that Aristotle would say that this is a case in which Beth *attempts* to get an orekton, but fails to do so. If this is right, he would not say that Beth gets an orekton, but that the orekton is only an apparent good; he would say that Beth failed to get the orekton that she attempted to get.²¹ Note that there is then a *further* question whether the orekton was actually good or only apparently good. Suppose apples were not good for Beth. Then, in biting into the worm-infested apple, she would be attempting to get an orekton that is only an apparent good.

Finally, it is also important to note that it is not the case that the only sort of mechanism by which something is falsely made to appear good to a creature is some kind of ethical defect, the creature’s being vicious or akratic or enkratic.²² Orexis covers both human and animal motivations (see e.g. *De an.* 3.10.433a9–12, 433b27–30, cf. 433b11–13), and although animals can have natural virtues, they cannot possess virtues in the strict sense, since these require reason (*NE* 6.13.1145b1–30), which they lack (see e.g. *NE* 7.3.1147b3–5). Instead, such creatures may desire things that are not in fact good for them because they are e.g. unhealthy or sick. And this will apply to us too, as is clear from some of the examples Aristotle provides in the *EE* 7.2 passage we have examined.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered Aristotle’s claim, in *De an.* 3.10, that the orekton, the object of desire in the broadest sense, is the good

Aristotle, since, as we have seen, he thinks that what is absolutely pleasant is absolutely good, so that what is absolutely pleasant is pleasant to the person in the right condition, and this is good for him (see §3(a)). Hence something can appear as though it would be pleasant, be encountered as pleasant, but not be absolutely pleasant.

²¹ The same point applies in Aristotle’s account of virtue: a just act, e.g., entails that a just distribution has been brought about, hence if one intentionally aims to bring about a just outcome, but is thwarted in doing so, one does not act justly, but can at most be said to have *attempted* to act justly. See Pearson (2006: Part 2, esp. 219).

²² Recall that with the broad notion of ‘good’, the attractions that akratic or enkratic agents grapple with but are beaten by (akratic) or victorious over (enkratic) themselves involve things appearing ‘good’.

or the apparent good. The context of Aristotle's discussion reveals that the 'apparent good' disjunct of Aristotle's specification is required because creatures might be in error about what actually is good for them. 'Apparent good' thus refers to something appearing *as* good even if it is not in fact good. This might seem problematic since Aristotle's account of orexis is meant to apply to animal as well as human desire, and much of what he claims elsewhere suggests that he thinks that animals cannot desire things *as* good. The resolution to this problem was shown to be that Aristotle possesses two different notions of 'good', one which includes pleasure (and the object of the thumos), and one which does not, but instead picks out the object of boulêsis. Animals can desire things *as* good in the broad sense, since in this sense of 'good' pleasure counts as a good, but it does not follow that they can desire things as good in the narrow sense, since to do so may require rational capacities they lack. *EE* 7.2 and *NE* 3.4 suggest that in claiming that the orekton is the good or apparent good, Aristotle means the orekton is what is good absolutely, or what appears good to someone, whether it is good absolutely or not. For both the perfect and the most imperfect agent the orekton is what appears good, it is just that for the former what appears good is good absolutely and so for him the orekton can also just simply be said to be 'the good'. The sort of error that Aristotle has in mind can occur is equivalent to someone who enjoys smoking, not someone who is deceived by a rotten apple. The latter would instead count as a failed attempt to get an orekton.

In the conclusion to [Chapter 1](#), I noted that given the diversity of states that Aristotle counts as orexeis one might well wonder what he thinks common to them all that makes him group them together under this term. In this chapter, a feature has emerged that Aristotle thinks common to all orexeis: a necessary condition for something to be an object of an orexis is that it must be construed as 'good' in the broad notion we have specified.²³ All orexeis

²³ I only claim that this is a necessary condition for a psychological state to be an orexis, not a necessary and sufficient condition, since it is unclear whether Aristotle would want to claim that, e.g. the belief that some action would be a good one for me to perform *just is* a desire to perform that action (cf. *NE* 3.2.1112a1–11). But a necessary condition at least provides a feature that is common to all orexeis.

are good- or value-based, in a sense broad enough to include all human forms of desire and animal desire as well: in order for some person or animal to desire something, they must see, construe or conceive that thing as valuable in some respect or other. Although Plato recognised the various species of desire (epithumia, thumos and boulêsis) and ascribed them different characteristics, Aristotle appears to want to emphasise that they also have something important in common. The different evaluative spheres that these desires represent can all be considered to be part of a more basic notion, namely, the very fact that they are all evaluative in some respect in the first place. This distinguishes them not only from negative evaluations, but also from states that are evaluatively neutral. Aristotle claims that various cognitive capacities are ‘discriminative’ (*kritika*: *De motu an.* 6.700b20, *De an.* 3.9.432a16), that is, involve discerning features of reality. Desires go beyond simple discrimination: from the viewpoint of a desire, the world lights up as valuable in some respect. In this respect, then, Aristotle holds the view frequently attributed to him that in order to desire something one must view that thing (action, state of affairs, etc.) *sub specie boni*, under the guise of the good.²⁴

²⁴ For contemporary discussion of this claim, see e.g. Anscombe (1957: §37), Watson (1982: 100–2), Velleman (1992), Stocker (1979), Hursthouse (1991), Quinn (1993), Scanlon (1998: 37–41), Raz (1999a). See also Chapter 8, §1, below.

PART II

ARISTOTLE'S CLASSIFICATIONS OF DESIRE

CHAPTER 4

SPECIES OF DESIRE I: EPITHUMIA (PLEASURE-BASED DESIRE)

In Part II of this book (Chapters 4 to 7), I consider Aristotle's classifications of orexis. He sub-divides orexis in two different ways; into the three species, epithumia, thumos and boulêsis; and into rational and non-rational orexeis (see *De an.* 3.9.432b4–b7, quoted in [Chapter 1](#), §1). In the next three chapters I examine the correlative objects of his three species of orexis. My goal is to ascertain precisely what these focal objects are. In [Chapter 7](#) I investigate Aristotle's division of desires into rational and non-rational.

Epithumia is a species of orexis: orexis for the pleasant.¹ The question I shall primarily address in this chapter is whether Aristotle thinks that epithumia can aim at any kind of pleasure, or whether he thinks that it is restricted to certain kinds of pleasure. What range of pleasures does the object of epithumia, the epithumêton, encompass? I first consider a narrow notion of epithumia, in which it connects to certain kinds of bodily pleasure (§1). I then look at a broader use of epithumia (§2). I close by examining two different senses in which epithumia can 'aim' at some object (§3). For an explanation of the epithumia terminology that will remain untranslated and unitalicised in this chapter (epithumia, epithumiai, epithumêton, epithumêtikon) the reader should consult the Introduction (§2).

¹ *Top.* 6.3.140b27–28, *Soph. el.* 173a39, *De an.* 2.3.414b5–6, *Rh.* 1.11.1370a17–18, cf. *NE* 3.12.1119b5–7. Elsewhere, Aristotle simply claims epithumia is 'of' or 'for' the pleasant: (*tou*) *hêdeos*; e.g. *Top.* 6.3.140b28, *Soph. el.* 13.173a39, *NE* 3.2.1111b17, *EE* 2.7.1223a34, 2.8.1224a37, 7.2.1235b22, *Part. an.* 2.17.661a8; or that what is in accordance with epithumia is pleasant (*ta kat' epithumian hêdea*: *NE* 3.1.1111a32–33); or that through epithumia is done whatever appears pleasant (*Rh.* 1.10.1369b23, cf. *Top.* 6.8.146b36–147a5).

I. A narrow notion of epithumia

In *Rhetoric* I.11, Aristotle employs an account of pleasure in which pleasure is characterised as ‘a certain process of change in the soul, i.e., a sudden and perceptible attainment of the natural state which belongs to it’ (1369b33–35).² On this view, if we are hungry, for example, this is an uncomfortable disruption to our natural state, and pleasure will occur as we replenish ourselves with food. Now, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle maintains that such processes account for only one way pleasure is generated. In addition, there are pleasures connected to activities or actualisations (*energeiai*).³ Indeed, in *NE* 7.12 Aristotle claims that the processes that restore us to our natural state are only ‘incidentally’ (*kata sumbebêkos*) pleasant (1152b34): people can, he suggests, enjoy even sharp and bitter things, neither of which are ‘pleasant by nature’, when they are being replenished from a disintegrated state (*NE* 1152b33–1153a7). But the important point for us is that at two points in the *NE* 7 discussion of pleasure epithumia seems to be associated with process pleasures, not pleasures connected to activities, and so may itself seem to be tied to pleasures connected to recovering from painful disrupted states of the body. (i) When Aristotle claims that pleasures of replenishment are not the only kind of pleasure, he points out that there are also pleasures that are ‘without pain or epithumia, e.g. those of contemplation (*theôrein*), the nature in such a case not being defective at all’ (7.12.1152b36–1153a2). This suggests that when pleasures *are* ‘with pain and epithumia’ this is because in order to get such a pleasure one must be replenishing a painful disrupted state and so

² Gosling and Taylor’s (1982: 196) translation. The account relates to those we find in Plato, cf. *Philebus* 31d–32b, 42d, 43b–c, *Timaeus* 64d. Fortenbaugh (1970: 44) claims that the *Rhetoric* view of pleasure ‘was made prominent with the Academy by Speusippus’ polemic against Eudoxus’.

³ This need not be a change of view, since the *Rhetoric* does not aspire to be scientifically accurate; see Gosling and Taylor (1982: 194–9) and cf. Striker (1996: 289–90). ‘Connected to activities’ is a purposely vague formulation that attempts to encompass both the accounts of pleasure that Aristotle provides in *NE* 7 and *NE* 10, whether or not one thinks that these are consistent, and regardless of how one attempts to resolve the tension between the texts if one thinks a resolution is either needed or possible. It does so because in both books non-replenishment pleasures are closely bound to activities, even if they are not straightforwardly identifiable with activities. The classic treatments on the tension are Owen (1971–2) and Gosling and Taylor (1982, esp. Chs. 11 and 13).

satisfying one's epithumia. (ii) A little later (1153a32), the phrase 'epithumia and pain' crops up again, but this time Aristotle provides an additional explanatory gloss. He claims that the pleasures that animals and children pursue are 'pleasures accompanied by epithumia and pain', adding: 'i.e. (*kai*) bodily pleasures, for it is these that are of that sort' (1153a32–33). The implication seems to be that epithumiai are tied to a painful disruptive bodily state, and are desires for the pleasure associated with replenishing that state.⁴ This reading appears to be confirmed by a number of other passages in which Aristotle connects epithumia to pain. Most explicitly, in *EE* 2.10, Aristotle distinguishes choice (*prohairesis*) from epithumia on the ground that 'epithumiai always (*aei*) involve pain' (1225b30–31).⁵

The connection that holds between epithumia and a painful disrupted state also seems to be present in Aristotle's account of temperance and self-indulgence. In *NE* 3.11 Aristotle draws a distinction between common epithumiai, such as the desire for food, drink or sex, and particular epithumiai, e.g. the desire for this or that kind of nourishment. With respect to common epithumiai, which he also calls 'natural', he tells us that very few go wrong because 'to eat or drink whatever offers itself till one is surfeited is to exceed the natural amount, since natural epithumia is the replenishment of one's deficiency' (1118b16–19). With respect to particular epithumiai, by contrast, he claims that many people go wrong and in many ways (1118b21–22). And it is going wrong in a general way with respect to particular epithumia that marks one out as self-indulgent:

⁴ In *NE* 7.12 Aristotle claims that the activity at work in the epithumiai for such pleasures is the activity of so much of our state and nature as has remained unimpaired (1152b35–36).

⁵ Cf. also: 'epithumia is of the pleasant and of the painful (*epilupou*)' (*NE* 3.2.1111b16–17); 'pain is found in the epithumêtikon, for this is where pleasure is also found' (*Top.* 4.5.126a9–10; cf. also *NE* 7.4.1148a21–22, *De an.* 2.2.413b23–24). The link to pain in these passages is probably to be taken in the way suggested by the process account (rather than e.g. a reference to sensory aversions); the pain in question being the uncomfortable state of having the desire, the satisfaction of which will be pleasant (cf. Socrates rubbing his leg in the *Phaedo*: 60b1–c7). (This fits with the proper understanding of another claim we find in the *Top.* 4.5 passage referred to above, namely, that fear is in the thumoeides (126a10); see [Chapter 5](#), §2, below.)

For while the people who are fond of so and so are so called because they delight either in the wrong things, or more than most people do, or in the wrong way, the self-indulgent exceed in all three ways; they both delight in some things that they ought not to delight in (since they are hateful), and if one ought to delight in some of the things they delight in, they do so more than one ought and than most men do. (1118b22–27)

But although it is common epithumiai that are explicitly linked to the replenishment account, not particular epithumiai, the replenishment account also seems to be in play with the latter: in referring to the self-indulgent person, who we have seen is characterised in terms of particular epithumiai, Aristotle claims that he is pained both when he fails to get such pleasures (on which, see *NE* 3.11.1118b28–33), and also ‘when he has epithumiai for them, for epithumia involves pain (*meta lupês*)’ (*NE* 3.11.1119a4). Since we here explicitly have a case in which bodily epithumiai *themselves* ‘involve pain’ it is highly likely that Aristotle has in mind epithumiai for pleasures that are tied to painful disruptive bodily states.

Let us now consider whether or not the connection between process pleasures and a painful disrupted bodily state holds of all bodily pleasures alike, and in the same way, on Aristotle’s account. Inquiry into this will reveal some further details of his view. A good place to begin is by further consideration of the field of temperance and self-indulgence. Aristotle marks this out as concerned with pleasure and pain and epithumia and aversion arising through touch and taste (*NE* 3.10.1118a23–26, also *NE* 7.7.1150a9–11). In justifying the restriction to touch and taste, Aristotle repeatedly appeals to linguistic practice and to how ‘*akolasia*’, ‘self-indulgence’, and ‘*sôphrosunê*’, ‘temperance’, are used: he insists that ‘no one calls’ such-and-such type of person ‘self-indulgent’ or ‘temperate’ (*NE* 3.10.1117b32, 1117b35–1118a1, 1118a4–5, 1118a8–9, 1118a11).⁶ So: no one calls those who delight in objects of *vision*, e.g. colours, shapes and painting, or those who delight in objects of *hearing*, e.g. music or acting, ‘self-indulgent’

⁶ The linguistic practice in question could of course be restricted in some way; Aristotle might, for example, be specifying how those who are ‘properly brought up’ would employ these words; for it is to such people that he is addressing his *Ethics* (see e.g. *NE* 1.4.1095b2–6).

or 'temperate'. When he comes to ruling out *odours*, however, his position is slightly more complicated. He claims that no one applies the terms 'self-indulgence' or 'temperance' to those who delight in odour, *unless it be incidentally (kata sumbebêkos)* (1118a9–10):

we do not call those self-indulgent who delight in the odour of apples or roses or incense, but rather those who delight in the odour of unguents (*muroi*) or of dainty dishes (*opsoi*); for self-indulgent people delight in these because these remind them of the objects of their epithumiai (*epithumêmata*). And one may see even other people, when they are hungry, delighting in the smell of food; but to delight in this kind of thing is the mark of the self-indulgent man; for these are objects of epithumia (*epithumêmata*) to him. (1118a10–16)

Delighting in odours per se does not mark someone out as self-indulgent. Only in so far as delighting in certain odours is an indicator of epithumiai might it be a sign of self-indulgence. (Hence the terms 'self-indulgence' or 'temperance' can be applied only 'incidentally' to delight in odours.) What are the envisaged epithumiai? They are, we are told, ones that an agent can be reminded of by, for example, the scent of perfumes or the smell of 'dainty dishes'. Since a prime example of a tactile pleasure with which temperance and self-indulgence is concerned is sexual intercourse, it is possible that the perfume in question is taken to remind the self-indulgent agent of some sexual encounter, for example with an adulterous lover. For the other example, the Greek that *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984) translates as 'dainty dishes', *opsoi*, can indeed refer to delicacies, of which fish was a common example in ancient Athens (see LSJ s.v.), and so perhaps Aristotle has in view someone who is reminded by the smell of such dishes (at e.g. the market place) of intemperately gorging himself on such food on some occasion. But *opsoi* can also refer to seasonings or sauces, and so it may be that Aristotle is thinking of a case in which the smell of some sauce reminds the agent of eating a certain delicacy.⁷ Either way, delight in each of these odours

⁷ I suppose one might think it a little rough on the hungry person to be told that his enjoying the smell of food is a sign of self-indulgence, but the general idea seems clear enough; think e.g. of grossly obese people eagerly smelling their vinegar drenched chips before tucking in, or serial adulterers fondly sniffing a garment that carries the scent of their latest conquest.

is only incidentally a sign of self-indulgence, that is, in so far as it indicates some other pleasure. It seems, then, that we are left with pleasures pertaining to the sense modalities of touch and taste as marking out the sphere of self-indulgence and temperance. But in fact, strictly speaking, even taste is not in question here:

for the business of taste is the discriminating of flavours, which is done by wine-tasters and people who season dishes; but they hardly take pleasure in making these discriminations, or at least self-indulgent people do not, but in the actual enjoyment, which in all cases comes through touch, both in the case of food and in that of drink and in that of sexual intercourse. (*NE* 3.10.1118a27–32)

It is the pleasure of touch that constitutes the domain of temperance in the strictest sense. Aristotle appears to have in mind the actual sensation of physical contact with the sexual organs or the feeling of the liquid or food passing down one's throat. Indeed, in this context, he refers to the gourmand who prayed that his throat become longer than a crane's, 'implying that it was the contact he took pleasure in' (*NE* 3.10.1118a32–1118b1). (In *EE* 3.2 Aristotle names and shames the culprit: Philoxenus, the son of Eryxis (1231a15–17).) And, as should now be clear, his paradigm examples of such desires are *epithumiai* for the pleasures associated with food, drink and sex. On Aristotle's view, such tactile pleasures 'appear slavish and brutish' (*NE* 3.10.1118a24–25), and 'self-indulgence is justly a matter of reproach because it attaches to us not as men but as animals' (1118b2–3). Self-indulgence attaches to us as animals because the pleasures in question are ones we share with non-rational animals.⁸

At this point let us briefly revisit a text we have already partially considered in [Chapter 2](#) (§4), concerning the point at which desire first arises as we go up Aristotle's hierarchy of psychic capacities. This text ties in with these points about temperance and self-indulgence in an interesting way. Although in *De an.* 2.2, when Aristotle first works his way up the various psychic capacities,

⁸ Cf. also *NE* 7.12.1153a31–33 (quoted earlier in this section), and *EE* 2.10.1225b27, where Aristotle claims that *epithumiai* also belong to beasts (*thêria*). Indeed, we find a good number of references in Aristotle's psychological and biological works to animal *epithumiai* for food, drink and sex. Food: e.g. *Part. an.* 2.17.661a7–9, 3.14.675b25–27, *De an.* 2.3.414b11–12, *Gen. an.* 1.4.717a24; drink: e.g. *De an.* 2.3.414b11–12; *De motu an.* 7.701a32; sex: e.g. *Hist. an.* 6.18.571b8–10, 7.1.581b20–21, *Gen. an.* 7.1.774a3–6.

epithumia emerges with perception in general and tactile pleasure is not singled out as primary,⁹ in *De an.* 2.3 this general line of thought is repeated, with touch now being specified as the base requirement for epithumia.¹⁰ In this passage, Aristotle begins by noting that plants have the nutritive faculty, but not the sensory (414a33–414b1), and then claims, as in *De an.* 2.2, that if any living thing has the sensory part it must also have the orektikon. But the justification for this now runs as follows:

orexis is comprised of epithumia, thumos and boulêsis; all animals have at least one sense, namely touch; and for that which has perception there are both pleasure and pain and both the pleasant and the painful: and where there are these, there is also epithumia: for this is orexis of the pleasant. (414b2–6)

Aristotle continues:

they have a sense concerned with food; for touch is such a sense; for all living things are nourished by dry and moist and hot and cold things, and touch is the sense for these and only incidentally the other objects of perception; for sound and colour and smell contribute nothing to nourishment, while flavour is one of the objects of touch. Hunger and thirst are forms of epithumia, hunger is epithumia for the dry and hot, thirst is epithumia for the moist and cold; and flavour is, as it were, a kind of seasoning of these. We must get clear about these matters later, but for now let us say this much, that those living things which have touch also have orexis. (414b6–16)

Animals have touch, and so find certain things they touch pleasant or painful, and so they have epithumia, since epithumia is for pleasure. This is in fact crucial to their being able to nourish themselves.¹¹

The claim in this last passage that, with respect to securing nourishment, other objects of perception (i.e. besides the objects of touch) are only incidental, should remind us of Aristotle's claim that self-indulgence only concerns odours incidentally, i.e. in so far as odours might serve as indicators of epithumiai for certain tactile pleasures. In fact, in the latter context Aristotle claims that

⁹ 'For where there is perception, there is also both pain and pleasure, and where these, there is of necessity also epithumia' (413b23–24; see also *Somn.* 1.454b29–31).

¹⁰ Of course, given my argument in [Chapter 2](#) (§4), creatures capable of such desires will also have to possess some (at least indeterminate: see *De an.* 3.11.433b31–434a5) kind of phantasia. I take this as read, but it is not crucial for the current discussion.

¹¹ See also *Part. an.* 2.17: 'all animals are able to perceive the pleasant taste derived from food, and so they have an epithumia for food, for epithumia is of the pleasant' (661a7–9).

animals besides man simply do not take pleasure in the non-tactile objects of perception *other than* incidentally:

Nor is there in animals other than man any pleasure connected with these senses [viz. sight, hearing and odour], except incidentally. For dogs do not delight in the scent of hares, but in the eating of them, but the scent told them the hares were there; nor does the lion delight in the lowing of the ox, but in eating it; but he perceived by the lowing that it was near, and therefore appears to delight in the lowing; and similarly he does not delight because he sees 'a stag or wild goat' [a quote from Homer's *Iliad* (3.24)], but because he is going to make a meal of it. (*NE* 3.10.1118a18–23)

Non-rational animals do not find the scent or the sight of their prey pleasurable in its own right, only the eating of them. But non-rational animals can take pleasure in such scents or sights 'incidentally', that is, as indicators of future tactile pleasures. In the parallel *EE* passage, Aristotle elaborates:

They do, indeed, feel pleasure at certain odours; but these gladden them incidentally and not of their own right. By those enjoyed not of their own right I mean those that give us pleasure owing to expectation and memory, e.g. the pleasure from the scent of foods and drinks; for these we enjoy because of a different pleasure, that of eating or drinking ... (*EE* 3.2.1231a6–10)

This line of thought is developed in *De sensu* 5, with respect to odours.¹² Aristotle claims that for a certain class of odours their pleasantness or unpleasantness belongs incidentally (443b20–21). He explains as follows:

owing to the fact that savours are qualities of nutrient matter, the odours connected with these are agreeable as long as animals have epithumiai for the food, but they are not agreeable to them when sated and no longer in want of it; nor are they agreeable, either, to those animals that do not like the food itself which yields the odours. Hence, as we observed, these odours are pleasant or unpleasant incidentally ... (443b21–26)

However, Aristotle acknowledges that there is another class of odours, namely, 'those agreeable in their essential nature, e.g. those of flowers'.¹³ Such odours, he suggests, are only perceptible by man, whereas the other kind, 'correlated with tastes',

¹² For a general discussion of Aristotle's account of the sense of smell, see Johansen (1996).

¹³ Similarly *EE* 3.2.1231a10–12: 'the odours enjoyed for their own right are such as flowers (therefore Stratonius neatly remarked that these smell beautifully (*kalon*), food, etc., pleasantly)'.

are perceptible by the other animals as well (444a3–5). But his account of the pure odours is very interesting for us. He writes:

these do not in any degree stimulate animals to food, *nor do they contribute in any way to epithumia*; their effect upon it, if any, is rather the opposite. For the verse of Strattis ridiculing Euripides contains a truth: ‘Use not perfumery to flavour soup’. (443b28–31, my italics)

Here, *epithumia* seems to be tied to the bodily pleasures that are connected to nourishment.¹⁴ This is why pleasures connected to the scent of flowers, for example, are said not to contribute in any way to *epithumia*. On this view, if one has a desire to smell a flower on the expectation that it would be pleasurable that would not count as an *epithumia*.

In fact, this line of thought is consistent with the account of *epithumia* we found in the *NE* passages we considered earlier, where *epithumia* seemed to be tied to bodily pleasures. This is because, in arguing that the process account of pleasure is restricted to certain pleasures, Aristotle does not simply insist that intellectual pleasures are not tied to such processes; he also holds that many sensory pleasures do not fit this pattern either. The replenishment view, he notes in *NE* 10.3, seems to be based on the pains and pleasures connected with nutrition, ‘on the fact that when people have been short of food and have felt pain beforehand they are pleased by the replenishment’ (1173b14–15). ‘But’, he then points out, ‘this does not happen with all pleasures’:

the pleasures of learning and, among the sensuous pleasures, those of smell, and also many sounds and sights, and memories and hopes, do not presuppose pain. Of what then will these be the coming into being? There has not been lack of anything of which they could be the replenishment. (1173b16–20)

The upshot is that Aristotle appears to have a notion of *epithumia* in which it is connected to pleasures that are tied to the animal’s survival; food, drink and sex. These are tactile pleasures. It is not that pleasures connected to other sense modalities cannot be objects of *epithumia*, but that when they are, they are so only incidentally, that is, in so far as they are an indicator of a possible

¹⁴ This restriction of *epithumia* is perhaps also implicit in a passage we quoted near the start of this section: ‘for self-indulgent people delight in these [sights, odours, sounds] because these remind them of the objects of their *epithumiai* (*epithumēmata*)’ (*NE* 3.10.1118a12–13).

tactile pleasure. Desires for other bodily pleasures, for example, the scent of flowers, or non-bodily pleasures, are not objects of *epithumia* at all. In this way, Aristotle seems to possess a notion of *epithumia* in which it is restricted not simply to bodily pleasures, but to a *subset* of such pleasures, namely those connected to touch, which aim to bring about nourishment (and reproduction). This notion of *epithumia* only extends to other sensory pleasures in so far as they indicate the presence of some such tactile pleasure. All *epithumiai*, on this account, are tied, whether directly or indirectly, to pleasures that presuppose a painful disruptive state, and this distinguishes them from desires for pleasures which do not involve a lack or presuppose any pain, whether they be bodily, as with certain smells, sights and sounds, or indeed non-bodily, as with contemplation (*NE* 7.12.1153a1) and the pleasure of learning (*NE* 10.3.1173b16–17). It is presumably this restricted notion of ‘*epithumia*’ that has motivated many translators to translate *epithumia* by ‘appetite’, since the latter most naturally refers to a physical desire for food, drink or sexual intercourse.

2. A broader notion of *epithumia*

Although there seems to be a clear thread in Aristotle’s works in which he adopts the narrow signification of the *epithumêton* we have just considered, that is not the end of the story. This is because a number of other passages suggest that he also possesses a broader notion of *epithumia* than the one just developed. In *Rhetoric* 1.11, he writes:

Everything is pleasurable for which there is an *epithumia*. For *epithumia* is *orexis* for the pleasant. Some *epithumiai* are non-rational (*alogon*), and some involve reason (*meta logou*). I call ‘non-rational’ those where people do not possess *epithumiai* (*epithumein*) on the basis of some supposition (*ek tou hupolambanein*). Of this sort are those people call ‘natural’,¹⁵ like those supplied from the body; for example, thirst and hunger for nourishment, and *epithumia* for a particular kind of food, and those concerned with taste and sex, and in general things that can be touched and things concerned with smell, hearing, and sight. ‘Involving reason’ are those where people have *epithumiai* (*epithumein*) on the basis of persuasion (*ek tou peisthênai*).

¹⁵ On ‘natural’, here, see *NE* 3.11.1118b9, 15, 19.

For people have epithumiai (*epithumein*) to observe (*theasasthai*) and possess many things when once having heard about them and been persuaded. (1370a16–27, my translation)

Here epithumiai extend not just to those bodily pleasures that are connected to thirst, hunger and sex, but also to pleasures stemming from smell, hearing and sight, and, indeed, to epithumiai ‘involving reason’. Of course, I suppose it could be that with the epithumiai for pleasures stemming from smell, hearing and sight, Aristotle only has in mind the incidental pleasures mentioned above, that is, those that are dependent on tactile pleasures in some way. But no such limitation is stated here and Aristotle actually claims ‘and *in general* things that can be touched and things concerned with smell, hearing, and sight’. Indeed, that we have a broader category of pleasures in play here than merely those dependent on touch will seem the natural reading if one takes Aristotle’s specification of bodily epithumiai as (examples of?) the non-rational epithumiai to indicate that the epithumiai ‘involving reason’ are *not* restricted to bodily pleasures. For if, on the notion of epithumia under consideration, there can be non-bodily epithumiai, it will no longer seem necessary that epithumiai are tied to painful bodily disruptions and, if that link goes, then there seems to be no reason to think that all epithumiai should be tied, whether directly or indirectly, to tactile pleasures.¹⁶

¹⁶ Interestingly, a passage in the *Rhetoric* attempts to account for a non-bodily pleasure within the replenishment model: ‘to learn and to wonder (*thaumazein*) are also for the most part pleasant. For wondering implies the epithumia (*epithumein*) to learn, so that the object of wonder is an epithumêton, and in learning one is brought into one’s natural state’ (1.11.1371a31–34). Perhaps this could be accommodated within the theory of learning as recollection we find in e.g. Plato’s *Meno*, in which, given that the soul is immortal, and has seen all things, there is nothing that it has not learnt (81c–d), even though it presumably has ‘forgotten’ much in its bodily incarnation. Perhaps, then, in recollecting what we already knew at one point, we are being brought back into our natural state? (Of course, this would not explain why such a disruptive state should be painful, rather than, say, ignorant bliss.) Whether or not this is what Aristotle had in mind, in extending the replenishment account to intellectual pleasures, the view evidently conflicts with *NE* 7 and *NE* 10 (see the end of the last section). (Perhaps this could be explained to some extent by the fact that Aristotle employs the process account of pleasure in *Rh.* 1.11, and does not mention the activity account.) But it should be noted that in this case the pleasure is still not tied to a painful *bodily* disruptive state: the example extends the notion of replenishment beyond bodily pleasures; it does not make contemplation a bodily pleasure.

The idea that there might be epithumiai for non-bodily pleasures receives support from a number of passages in which Aristotle refers to this desire as having non-bodily objects. So, in *NE* 3.1 he writes of epithumiai for health and learning (1111a31). In *NE* 7.4 he refers to epithumiai for wealth, gain, victory and honour (1148a25–26, cf. 7.4.1147b29–31). And wealth and victory are also specified as objects of epithumia in the *Rhetoric*: in 1.10 Aristotle mentions a poor man who has an epithumia for wealth (1369a12–13); and in 1.11 he claims: ‘victory also is pleasant, and not merely to the competitive but to everyone; the winner sees himself in the light of a champion, and everybody has a more or less keen epithumia for that’ (1370b32–34). In all of these cases the epithumiai in question seem to be non-bodily and beyond the reach of non-rational animals. Another less explicit text is the *EE* 7.2 passage we considered in detail in the last chapter (§3(a)). Aristotle there links the pleasant to epithumia and the good to boulêsis in the context of asking whether the good or the pleasant is the object of love or affection. After concluding that we love both the pleasant and the good, he appears, in the passage that follows, to operate with a division of pleasures into bodily pleasures and pleasures of the soul (1235b35–1236a7). The latter include pleasures of the practically wise agent, and for him what is absolutely good is absolutely pleasant. Now, given that we are still working with a good/pleasant contrast, and good and pleasant were introduced as being the objects of boulêsis and epithumia respectively, one might not unreasonably assume that these pleasures of the soul would still count as objects of epithumia, which, after all, was simply introduced, without qualification, as ‘for the pleasant’ (*tou hêdeos*: 1235b22).¹⁷ Overall these passages suggest that besides the narrow signification of epithumia we discussed

¹⁷ Also, the pleasures of the body, here, seem to extend beyond ones directly or indirectly tied to touch (see (j) in the quote in [Chapter 3](#), §3(a)). Another interesting passage is: ‘Kindness is great if shown to one who is in great need ... Orexeis constitute such needs; and in particular orexeis accompanied by pain for what is not being attained. Epithumiai are of this kind, e.g. sexual desire, and those which arise during bodily injuries and in dangers; for both the man in danger and the man in pain have epithumiai (*epithumein*)’ (*Rh.* 2.7.1385a19–20, 21–25). Epithumiai that arise in danger seem to be aimed at the pleasure of the danger being seen to pass.

in §1, Aristotle also recognises a broader notion which includes desires for non-bodily pleasures.

And yet this conclusion has been resisted. Bostock (2000: 34 n.8) claims that in these cases Aristotle ‘slips to a wider usage’ in which there is no clear distinction between *epithumia* and *boulêsis*. If this were right, Aristotle would effectively be employing *epithumia* as synonymous with *orexis* in the passages I have mentioned. But it is not right. It is implausible to claim that in the cases I have listed above Aristotle is reverting to a broader usage of *epithumia* that includes all types of desire. In the *NE* 3.1 passage, which Bostock cites, Aristotle mentions *thumos* as well, and states that *epithumia* is for the pleasant (1111a32–33) (and in the very next chapter he discusses *epithumia* as distinct from both *boulêsis* and *thumos*). In the *NE* 7.4 passage, the relevant lines state that *epithumiai* and pleasures are of this type, and so Aristotle appears to be thinking of pleasure-based *epithumia*, as is characteristic of his account of this desire considered as distinct from *boulêsis* (and, as with the previous passage, *thumos* is again nearby, at e.g. 1148b13). In the *Rh.* 1.10 passage, Aristotle is in the process of expounding the distinction between the three sorts of *orexis*, and so surely has a restricted use of *epithumia* in mind. In the *Rh.* 1.11 passage about victory the connection to pleasure is explicit. And finally in the *Rh.* 1.11 passage I quoted at the beginning of this section, Aristotle begins with the remark that *epithumia* is *orexis* of the pleasant (1370a17–18). It thus seems clear that Aristotle is not in these passages slipping to a wider notion of *epithumia* in which it is synonymous with *orexis*. Instead, he seems to be providing a broader notion of *epithumia* that is still nevertheless connected to pleasure.

In this respect, *NE* 3.10 is again of interest. Before determining which kind of bodily pleasures temperance is concerned with, in the passages we considered in §1, Aristotle first notes that temperance is not concerned with non-bodily pleasures. He writes:

A distinction should be drawn between bodily pleasures and those of the soul, such as love of honour (*philotimia*) and love of learning (*philomatheia*); for the lover of each of these delights in that of which he is a lover, the body being in no way affected, but rather the mind (*dianoia*); but men who are concerned with such pleasures are called neither temperate nor self-indulgent. (1117b28–32)

In this way, Aristotle restricts temperance to bodily pleasures. But what is interesting for us here is that under ‘pleasures of the soul’ Aristotle mentions examples he provided in *NE* 3.1 and 7.4 with respect to epithumia (i.e. pleasures of learning and honour; and later he gives loss of money as an example of a non-bodily pain: 1118a1). This suggests that on the expanded notion of epithumia the distinguishing feature of the desire is that it is for pleasure; pleasure, though, that may be either ‘bodily’, satisfying hunger, thirst, sexual desire, the need to get warm when cold, etc., or ‘of the soul’, such as pleasures of learning, honour, victory, friendship (1118a1). And, in this broader sense, ‘appetite’ seems less appropriate as a translation of epithumia, since Aristotle’s term picks out pleasure-based desires more generally, not simply bodily appetites.¹⁸

3. *De re* and *de dicto* objects of epithumia

I have resisted Bostock’s suggestion that in the passages I cited Aristotle was using epithumia in a way in which it becomes synonymous with orexis, because in these passages Aristotle still

¹⁸ The account of temperance in *NE* can be read as compatible with the broader notion of epithumia. When Aristotle claims that self-indulgent people delight in perfumes or dainty dishes because these remind them of the objects of their epithumiai (1118a10–16, quoted above in §1), this may simply be picking out the epithumiai of self-indulgent agents, not limiting the scope of epithumia. Likewise, when in 3.11 he claims that the self-indulgent person is pained when he has epithumiai for the relevant pleasant things, for epithumiai involves pain (see the beginning of §1 above), he may only have in mind the self-indulgent agent’s epithumiai, and not be claiming that all epithumiai involve pain. That said, the latter gloss is naturally read as a general claim. But my point is not that in *NE* 3.10 Aristotle has in mind that desires for pleasures of the soul count as epithumiai, but simply that the examples of non-bodily epithumiai he provides elsewhere match his examples of pleasures of soul here, and so that, were we to push him on this point, he might have then conceded that we could describe such desires as epithumiai for pleasures ‘of the soul’. (Cf. also *EE* 3.2, where Aristotle claims that the temperate man ‘does not exhibit his temperance in regard to all epithumiai [*pasas*] picking up ‘*epithumias*’ in 1230b21–22] and all pleasures, but about the objects, as it seems, of two senses, taste and touch, or rather about touch alone’ (1230b23–25). One might think that this means that desires for other pleasures still count as epithumiai. But since Aristotle then goes on to distinguish pure instances of such bodily pleasures from ones that are only incidentally pleasant in so far as they are indicators of pleasures connected to food, drink and sex (1230b25–1231a18), it seems possible that in fact the broader category of epithumiai alluded to only extends to those for the pleasures of other senses in so far as they are dependent on tactile pleasures.)

seems to connect epithumia to pleasure and still seems to distinguish epithumia from his other desires. When Aristotle refers to epithumiai for learning or victory, etc., he seems to have in mind cases in which we are motivated to pursue such things because we view them as pleasurable, that is, cases in which we desire to learn *as* pleasant or desire to win *as* pleasant, and this makes it plausible to think that he would still view such epithumiai as distinct from thumos-desires or boulêseis which, as we shall see in more detail in the next two chapters, have different general objects. But a central passage may seem to jar with this analysis. In *NE* 3.12, Aristotle claims that in a temperate agent the epithumêtikon ‘harmonises with reason, for the noble (*to kalon*) is the aim [or ‘target’: *skopos*] of both’ (1119b16). Since here we have both reason and epithumia aiming at the same object, the noble, it might appear that we are now considering a case in which the agent’s epithumiai aim at what is noble *as* noble, not at noble things *as* pleasant (cf. also *NE* 10.5.1175b28–29). But if, as I have insisted, pleasure is the correlative object of epithumia, how can this be so?¹⁹ We cannot sensibly suggest, along the lines of Bostock, that Aristotle here slips to a wider usage of epithumia in which it signifies orexis: as we have seen, he explicitly connects epithumia to pleasure throughout his discussion of temperance – indeed, apparently to the narrow notion of pleasure concerned with tactile sensations pertaining to eating, drinking and sexual intercourse. But if, in this context, Aristotle has in mind epithumiai that concern tactile bodily pleasures, how can he now claim that in the temperate agent the epithumêtikon aims at the noble?

The answer is that there are two different ways in which a desire can ‘aim’ at an object, what we might term *de dicto* and *de re* notions of ‘aim’ (cf. [Chapter 3](#), §3 (end)). (I should perhaps emphasise that I am obviously not claiming that Aristotle would formulate his distinction in terms of the *de dicto/de re* distinction, just that it is helpful for me to employ this distinction in explicating his view.) On the *de dicto* notion, what a desire aims at is the action desired under the specific desirability feature that is sought. So an epithumia might aim at learning *as* pleasant. On the

¹⁹ Cf. also the passage I defused at the end of §2 of [Chapter 3](#) above.

de re notion, by contrast, what the desire aims at is not the action desired under the specific desirability feature that is sought, but the action under some other description, a description that will standardly purport to state how things ‘actually are’. So if what I want to learn will actually be unpleasant to learn, then my desire would aim *de re* at an unpleasant learning experience.²⁰ Now of course if we are employing ‘aim’ in the *de dicto* sense we would deny that our desire has that aim. ‘I am not aiming at an unpleasant learning experience’, we might say, ‘but the pleasure of learning’.²¹ But the *de re* notion of ‘aim’ also latches onto ordinary language. We can say: ‘In spite of what you think, you are actually aiming at an unpleasant learning experience’. Note also that even when the act desired will actually turn out to be as it is described by the desirability feature, there is still a difference between the *de dicto* and *de re* specifications of the aim. If I desire to eat a cream cake for the pleasure it will provide and it will in fact provide that very pleasure, my desire aims *de dicto* at the cake *as* pleasant, whereas my desire aims *de re* simply at a pleasant cake, not at it *as* pleasant. In such a case, the ‘other’ description provided by the *de re* specification of the aim simply states that the cake will in fact prove pleasurable, it does not specify how the agent views eating such a cake. As far as the *de re* specification goes, it makes no difference whether the cake is desired *as* healthy, or *as* fattening, or *as* whatever; all that is specified is that what is aimed at is something that will in fact be pleasant.

My suggestion, then, is that in claiming that the epithumêtikon of the temperate agent aims at the noble, in *NE* 3.12, Aristotle is using ‘aim’ in a *de re* sense. Although bodily pleasure is the *de dicto* aim of the temperate agent’s epithumiai, it can be claimed that since he has a good character, and only has epithumiai appropriately, his epithumiai aim at what is noble in the *de re* sense,

²⁰ Compare the distinction in [Chapter 2](#), §1, between the act desired and the act desired under a specific desirability characteristic. The contrast here is not this, but instead the distinction between the act desired under a specific desirability feature (the aim *de dicto*) and the act desired under some other characteristic that purports to state what is in fact the case (the aim *de re*, the nature of things).

²¹ When the *de dicto* aim is mistaken, the error may occur in either of the ways specified in [Chapter 3](#), §4.

that is, at what is *in fact* noble, even though they do not aim at it *as* noble. The agent's epithumia thus does not aim at the noble in both the *de dicto* and the *de re* senses of 'aim'. This reading seems to be confirmed by the surrounding passages. At the end of 3.11, Aristotle writes:

The temperate man occupies a middle position with regard to these objects [*sc.* particular pleasures concerned with food, drink and sex]. For he neither enjoys the things that the self-indulgent man enjoys most – but rather dislikes them – nor in general the things that he should not, nor anything of this sort to excess, nor does he feel pain or epithumia when they are absent, or does so within due limits (*metriōs*), and not more than he should, nor when he should not, and so on; but the things that, being pleasant, make for health or good condition, he will desire within due limits and as he should, and also other pleasant things if they are not hindrances to these ends, or contrary to what is noble, or beyond his means. For he who neglects these conditions loves pleasures more than they are worth, but the temperate man is not that sort of person, but the sort of person that right reason (*orthos logos*) prescribes. (1119a11–20)

There is much that is worth examining in this passage concerning what and when the temperate agent can and cannot desire, but this is not crucial for me now.²² More relevant is the point that the temperate agent has epithumiai for particular bodily pleasures as he ought, when he ought, to the degree he ought, and so on (cf. esp. *NE* 2.9.1109a28–30), and so is the sort of person right reason prescribes. This point is developed in the passage leading up to the claim that in the temperate man the epithumētikon aims at the noble (in *NE* 3.12). Aristotle acknowledges that the name 'self-indulgence' (*akolasia*) has also been applied to certain childish faults (he does not specify which). He then suggests that in fact the transference is not a bad one because 'that which desires what is base and which develops quickly ought to be kept in a chastened condition (*kekolasthai*),²³ and these characteristics belong above all to epithumia and to the child, since children in fact live at the beck and call of epithumia, and it is in them that orexis for the pleasant is strongest' (1119b4–7). He continues:

²² I say a bit more in Pearson ([forthcoming\(a\)](#)); see also Young (1988: 534–5).

²³ As *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: 1767n.27) notes, *akolastos* ('self-indulgent') is here connected with *kolazein* ('chasten', 'punish').

If, then, it [*sc.* *epithumia* = *orexis* for the pleasant] is not going to be obedient and subject to the ruling principle (*archon*), it will go to great lengths; for in a non-rational being the *orexis* for pleasure is insatiable and tries every source of gratification, and the exercise of *epithumia* increases its innate force, and if *epithumiai* are strong and violent they even expel the power of calculation.²⁴ Hence they should be within due limits and few, and should in no way oppose reason – and this is what we call an obedient and chastened state – as the child should live according to the direction of his tutor, so the *epithumêtikon* should live according to reason. Hence the *epithumêtikon* in a temperate man should harmonise (*sumphônêin*) with reason; for the noble is the aim [or ‘target’: *skopos*] for both, and the temperate man has *epithumiai* (*epithumêin*) for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (1119b7–18)

Reason directs us to have *epithumiai* for the things we ought, as we ought, and when we ought. Since non-rational creatures lack reason, they run the risk of being dominated by their *epithumiai*, which are self-fuelling (as it were) and become stronger each time the creature satisfies one of them. Children at least have the ability to do as they are told, and to be directed by their tutors (and parents), and so can obey reason, even if they cannot follow it themselves since they do not fully possess it (cf. also *NE* 2.3.1104b11–13, *NE* 10.9.1179b31–1180a5). ‘So too’, we are told, ‘the *epithumêtikon* should live according to reason.’ That is, like the child, it cannot follow reason itself, but it can ‘obey’ and, indeed, ‘harmonise’ with reason (see also below). The *epithumêtikon* of the temperate agent, then, does not aim at the noble *as* noble, but it does aim at actions that are in fact noble, since the temperate agent has *epithumiai* for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought. The *epithumêtikon*, that is, aims at the noble in the *de re* sense of ‘aim’. If there was ever any doubt that Aristotle thought that something can ‘aim’ at something in a *de re* sense, it should now be dispelled. Non-rational creatures, since they lack reason, *cannot* aim at what reason directs in the *de dicto* sense, but if the child obeys his tutor (or a dog his owner, etc.), he can aim at what reason directs in the *de re* sense, that is, he can aim at what is in fact noble. So too, with the *epithumêtikon*.

The point here also informs Aristotle’s claim in *NE* 1.13 that the *epithumêtikon* ‘shares in reason in a sense, in so far as it listens

²⁴ Cf. the excitable type of impetuous akratic who does not wait on reason owing to the violence of his passions (*NE* 7.7.1150b25–28).

to and obeys it' (1102b30–31).²⁵ The 'listening to' and 'obeying', here, pick up the relevant parts of Aristotle's claim a few lines earlier that in the enkratic agent the non-rational part obeys reason, whereas in the virtuous agent, 'it is still more ready to listen, for in him it speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as reason' (1102b27–28). The epithumêtikon of the enkratic agent counts as sharing in reason because, although the enkratic agent has conflicting rational and non-rational impulses (1102b14–21), his epithumêtikon obeys his rational side in so far as it does not (unlike in the akratic agent) prevent his rational part from dictating what he actually does. The epithumêtikon of the temperate agent, by contrast, shares in reason in so far as it 'listens' to reason, and this amounts to it 'harmonising' or 'speaking on all matters with the same voice' as reason, that is, urging the agent to act in the very same way as reason does itself.

Conclusion

A number of commentators have thought that Aristotle intends to restrict epithumia to bodily pleasures.²⁶ What is right about this is that Aristotle does on occasion employ a notion of epithumia in which it is connected to bodily pleasures; indeed, not just bodily pleasures, but specifically tactile pleasures that arise, whether directly or indirectly, from ameliorating painful disruptive bodily states.²⁷ What is wrong about this characterisation is that it fails

²⁵ The fact that Aristotle writes 'in so far' (*hêi*), here, suggests that the sharing relation holds only when listening or obeying occurs, and since this does not occur in akratic agents, their non-rational part will not count as sharing in reason, contra e.g. Grönroos (2007: 259n.23). See also Chapter 5 (end of §3) below, following Pearson (2011b: §4).

²⁶ E.g. Bostock (2000: 34n.8), Hardie (1968: 219), cf. Crisp (2000: 206), Striker (1996: 290).

²⁷ As to why he may be prone on occasion to focus on this type of epithumia, the following reasons naturally suggest themselves: such epithumiai are closely bound up with temperance, one of his core virtues; they are thereby bound up with the strictest notion of akrasia (which is concerned with the same range of pleasures as this virtue; see *NE* 7.4.1147b24–1148a17); they are desires that other animals are restricted to, and are desires for the pleasures that are most likely to lead us astray, since they connect to us as animal rather than as an intellectual human being (*NE* 3.10.1118a24–25); and they are a powerful force in so far as they are sensory in origin, and things that appeal to our senses are immediately recognisable, can be violent in force, and tied to intense feeling

to acknowledge that Aristotle also on occasion invokes a broader notion of *epithumia*. And this notion is not, as Bostock suggests, one in which *epithumia* becomes synonymous with *orexis*; rather, it is one which retains the link to pleasure, but extends the notion of pleasure in play to include other kinds of bodily pleasures and also non-bodily pleasures, such as the pleasures of learning or victory. Aristotle thus appears to employ two different notions of *epithumia*, one narrow, one broad. The implications of his adopting either of these notions of the *epithumêton*, with respect to his overall account of the *orekton*, will be considered further in [Chapter 8](#). In the last part of this chapter, I noted two different ways in which *epithumia* could be said to ‘aim’ at some end. This enabled me to explain a sense in which *epithumia* could aim at the noble, even though in each instance it involves desiring its object *as* pleasant. This point about the ‘aim’ of a desire shall prove important in the next chapter as well, when we consider a popular account of the object of Aristotle’s second species of *orexis*, *thumos*.

(cf. *NE* 7.14.1154a26–31), hence they are thereby easy to be consumed or obsessed by (see also *NE* 7.13.1153b33–1154a1, *NE* 7.14.1154a26–1154b20).

CHAPTER 5

SPECIES OF DESIRE II: THUMOS (RETALIATORY DESIRE)

I now turn to thumos, Aristotle's second species of orexis.¹ In general, Aristotle has less to say about thumos than he does epithumia or boulêsis, but there are still a number of passages we can draw on. As with epithumia, the question I shall primarily address concerns the scope of thumos: what is thumos a desire *for*? And, as with epithumia, there are narrower and broader answers one might attempt to give to that question. I begin by considering the way that Aristotle connects thumos to orgê ('anger') (§1). I then consider some possible broader significations of thumos, and examine a role Aristotle may assign to thumos in the virtue of courage (§2). Finally, I assess the view, advocated by several commentators, that thumos holds some special connection to the noble or the fine (*to kalon*) (§3). As mentioned in the Introduction (§2), I shall leave my key thumos terminology (thumos, thumoi, thumoeides, thumikon and orgê) untranslated and unitalicised.

1. Thumos and anger

Sometimes Aristotle appears to use thumos and orgê ('anger') as synonyms.² Here are some examples: in *EE* 2.7, after a discussion

¹ *De an.* 2.3.414b2, 3.9.432b3–7, *De motu an.* 6.700b22, 7.701a36–701b1, *EE* 2.7.1223a26–27, 2.10.1225b24–26, cf. *Sens.* 1.436a9, *NE* 3.2.1111b11, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a1–4, where orgê is picked up by thumos at a7.

² 'Orgê' has two basic significations: (i) 'natural impulse', 'propensity', and (hence) 'temperament', 'disposition', 'mood'; and (ii) 'anger', 'wrath'. It is the second of these that Aristotle has in mind. The active verb *organ* does not refer specifically to anger, but means 'to be eager', 'to be ready', 'to be excited', and can be used e.g. of animals when they are 'in heat' and desire sexual intercourse. It is instead the middle-passive form of the verb, *orgizesthai*, that is used directly to correspond to the anger signification of orgê, signifying 'to make angry', 'provoke to anger', or more frequently (in the passive) 'to grow angry' (see LSJ s.v. for all). We can see *organ* and

of thumos and voluntariness, Aristotle refers to epithumia and thumos in one line (1223b27) and then replaces thumos by orgê in the next (b28); in *EE* 3.1, Aristotle mentions the (pseudo-) courage of brutes that, owing to thumos, run to meet the blow (1230a22–23), and then claims that the truly courageous agent is not someone who holds his ground through orgê (1230a24);³ in *NE* 5.8, Aristotle asserts that acts issuing from thumos are not correctly judged premeditated, and notes that it is not the man who acts from thumos but the man who made him angry (*ho orgisas*) that started it (1135b25–28) (orgê is also used in b29); and, in *Rh.* 1.10, Aristotle divides orexis into rational and non-rational, and claims that rational desire is boulêsis, non-rational desire orgê and epithumia (1369a1–4). But on the subsequent list of states responsible for action, he replaces orgê with thumos (1369a7).⁴

But even when orgê is not explicitly mentioned, Aristotle's use of thumos is often so closely tied to his account of orgê that it seems most likely that it is this account that he has in mind. In *Rhetoric* 2.2 Aristotle defines orgê as:

an orexis accompanied by pain (*meta lupês*) for an apparent revenge (*timôrias phainomenês*) owing to an apparent slight (*dia phainomenên oligôrian*) at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one's friends. (2.2.1378a30–32)⁵

orgizesthai employed in the very same clause in *De an.* 1.1: ὅταν ὀργῇ τὸ σῶμα καὶ οὕτως ἔχη ὥσπερ ὅταν ὀργίζηται (which Hamlyn (1993) renders: 'when the body is aroused and is as it is when it is in anger') (403a21–22). For discussion of Aristotle's account of orgê see e.g. Fortenbaugh (2002: e.g. 94–9), and Konstan (2006: Ch. 2). For discussion of the Greek conception of orgê more generally, see e.g. Allen (2002: esp. 50–9); for discussion of the Greek conception of thumos more generally, see Padel (1992: 27–30). I shall focus on Aristotle's understanding of thumos, but in so doing shall have to draw on Plato at a key point.

³ In the second passage, he also claims that the truly courageous agent is not someone who holds his ground because of ill-repute (*adoxia*) (1230a24), but this picks up political courage (where agents are motivated to stand firm because of shame (*aidôs*)), which was mentioned before the thumos case (1230a16–21).

⁴ See also e.g. *Pol.* 5.10.1312b25–34, *EE* 2.5.1222a42–1222b4, *EE* 3.1.1229a20–29, *NE* 4.5.1126a21. Interestingly, later on in *Rh.* 1.10, Aristotle claims that acts of revenge (*ta timôrêtika*) are those owing to thumos and orgê (1369b11–12). Perhaps the 'and' (*kai*), here, is being used epexegetically (= 'i.e.'). Aristotle then refers the reader to his separate later discussion of orgê in book 2 (1369b14–15) but, significantly, he also refers forward to this subsequent account as providing a discussion of thumos at *Rh.* 1.13 (1373b36–37).

⁵ Ross (1959) (after Spengel) deletes the first 'apparent'; Kassel (1976) keeps it. See Fortenbaugh (2002: 95–9) for discussion. For how we should understand *phantasia* and *phainomenon* in general in Aristotle's accounts of the emotions, see Dow (2009).

Where 'slight' (*oligôria*), he later explains, is to be construed as having three species; contempt (*kataphronêsis*), spite (*epêreasmos*), and insult (*hubris*) (1378b14–15). And when Aristotle employs thumos it is often clear that it is revenge that is being sought or a slight that is being reacted to. In *EE* 3.1 he claims that thumos is not without a certain pleasure, since it involves the hope for revenge (*timôria*) (1229b31–32). (This is in fact precisely echoed in the *Rh.* discussion: 'orgê must always be attended by a certain pleasure: that which arises from the hope for revenge' (2.2.1378b1–2).) In *EE* 3.3 he refers to 'the pain arising from thumos' (1231b6), and 'that pain which we call thumos' (1231b15), in a discussion of the virtue concerned with gentleness and irascibility (*peri praotêtos kai chalepotêtos*), which concerns whether or not we are tolerant of slights (*oligôria*: 1231b13).⁶ Consider also *Pol.* 5.12: Aristotle here warns that of those who attempt assassination, those who do not care whether they survive (so long as they effect their purpose) are the most dangerous, and therefore special precaution should be taken with any who think that either they or those for whom they care have been insulted (*hubrizesthai*) (1315a24–28):

for when men are led away by thumos to assault others they are unsparing of themselves. As Heraclitus says: 'It is difficult to fight against thumos; for a man will buy revenge with his soul'. (1315a29–31)

More explicit still is *NE* 7.6, where both slights and revenge are explicitly mentioned:

thumos by reason of the warmth and hastiness of its nature, though it hears, does not hear an order, and springs to take revenge. For reason or phantasia informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and thumos, reasoning as it were that anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightway ... (1149a30–34)

The connection of thumos to pain or distress (*lupê*) in the *EE* 3.3 passage just mentioned of course also ties it to the definition in the *Rhetoric* (in which orgê was characterised as an orexis

⁶ This, coupled with the fact that in *Rh.* 2.3 gentleness is described as the opposite of orgê (1380a6–7) and that in *NE* 4.5, the parallel chapter to *EE* 3.3, Aristotle uses orgê instead of thumos, suggests that thumos in *EE* 3.3 is being used as an equivalent for orgê (especially given that Aristotle had earlier used thumos and orgê interchangeably in *EE*, in the passages I referred to at the start of this section).

accompanied by pain (*meta lupê*).⁷ This connection of thumos to pain may remind us of the fact that epithumia (in the narrow notion we considered in [Chapter 4](#), §1) was tied to pain as well. Indeed, in one of the passages in which Aristotle connects epithumia to pain, he simultaneously connects thumos to pain as well (*EE* 2.10.1225b30–31: ‘epithumia and thumos always involve pain’). There is a difference here, though. In the epithumia case the pain seemed to be bodily, whereas here it often seems to be some kind of mental distress: it is caused by a slight, and slights need not be physical (although of course they can be). But the link may be sufficient to explain why Aristotle sometimes places epithumia and thumos on lists as emotions (*pathê*), given that he is prone to provide a general characterisation of emotions alongside such lists as ‘those [states] accompanied by pleasure or pain (*hois hepetai hedonê ê lupê*)’.⁸ And, interestingly, in the *NE* list of the emotions we find orgê and epithumia on the list, but not thumos (*NE* 2.5.1105b21–23, cf. 2.6.1106b18–20), whereas in the parallel list in *EE* we find thumos and epithumia, but not orgê (*EE* 2.2.1220b12–13).⁹

De an. 1.1 also manifests an interesting interchange between thumos and orgê. Aristotle lists getting angry (*orgizesthai*) and having epithumiai (*epithumein*), alongside being confident (*tharrein*) and perceiving (*aisthanesthai*), as instances in which the

⁷ See also *Pol.* 5.10, where Aristotle claims that hatred (*misos*) is more responsive to reason than orgê (thumos was used at 1312b30), since orgê is accompanied by pain, which is an impediment to reason, whereas hatred is painless (1312b32–34). In *Top.* 4.5 Aristotle argues that pain should not be construed as the genus of orgê, since ‘when the angry man (*orgizomenos*) feels pain, the pain has appeared in him earlier than the orgê; for his orgê is not the cause of his pain, but his pain of his orgê, so that orgê simply is not pain’ (125b32–34). This might explain how orgê is *meta lupês* (but cf. *EE* 3.3.1231b15, quoted above). See also Dow (2011: §1).

⁸ *NE* 2.5.1105b21–23, *Rh.* 2.1.1378a19–22, cf. *EE* 2.2.1220b12–14. Indeed, in *NE* 3.1, Aristotle refers to thumos and epithumia as non-rational *pathê* (1111b1–2). For an excellent discussion of Aristotle’s account of emotions as involving pleasure and pain in *Rh.*, see Dow (2011).

⁹ If one were tempted by the idea that orgê has replaced thumos in *NE*, one will ultimately be disappointed. It is true that the virtue concerned with good temper is said to concern orgê (except at 1126a21) in *NE* (4.5), whereas thumos plays more of a role in the parallel *EE* chapter (3.3), but we nevertheless find many references to thumos in *NE*, even if we ignore the common books; e.g. *NE* 2.3.1105a8, 3.1.1111a25–1111b2, 3.2.1111b11–19, 3.8.1116b23–1117a4. And the juxtaposition of thumos and epithumia in the *NE* 3.1 and 3.2 passages just mentioned suggests that Aristotle has in mind thumos as one of the three kinds of orexis, as is explicitly stated in *EE*: 2.7.1223a26–27, 2.10.1225b24–26.

soul neither is affected, nor acts, apart from the body (403a6–7). But then a few lines later, when he asserts that all the *pathê* (affections or emotions) of the soul involve the body ('for at the same time as these the body is affected in a certain way'), and provides another list, only confidence (*tharsos*) survives from the previous incarnation. The list in full runs: thumos, gentleness, fear, pity, confidence, joy, loving and hatred (403a17–18). Thumos appears to have replaced *orgê*, *epithumia* and perception are lost entirely, and a number of other emotions have been added.¹⁰ Aristotle then (403a19–22) attempts to support his claim that all the *pathê* involve the body by pointing to the fact that sometimes when severe sufferings befall us we are not provoked to fear (i.e. presumably when our bodies happen to be in a state that prevents fear), while at other times we are moved by small and imperceptible things when the body is aroused or primed (*organ*: see n.2). His example of the latter is *orgizesthai*, getting angry, which seems to be the verb corresponding to thumos in the previous list. Aristotle then (403a24–25) makes his famous announcement: 'If this is so, it is clear that the *pathê* are enmattered accounts (*logoi enuloi*)', and he illustrates how a specification of such a state should go with getting angry (*orgizesthai*): 'Being angry is a particular movement of a body of such-and-such a kind or a part or potentiality of it, as a result of this thing and for the sake of that' (403a26–27). He then notes: 'the student of nature (*phusikos*) and the dialectician (*dialektikos*) would define each of these differently, e.g. what *orgê* is' (403a29–30), reverting to *orgê*, rather than thumos, as the noun corresponding to *orgizesthai*. The dialectician would, he suggests, define it as 'an orexis for revenge, or something of the sort' (which brings to mind Aristotle's definition in *Rh.*); whereas the student of nature would define it as 'the boiling of the blood and hot stuff round the heart' (403a30–403b1). The latter, he claims, gives the matter, the former the form (*eidos*) and principle (*logos*). But then, having further considered the kind of definition the student of nature would provide (403b7–16), Aristotle concludes the chapter with the remark that the *pathê* of the soul, 'at any rate in

¹⁰ Burnyeat (1997: 433, 433n.38) thinks that the omission of perception from the second list is significant, Caston argues otherwise (2005: 281–5).

so far as they are like thumos and fear', are inseparable from the natural matter of animals in which they occur (403b17–18), once more reverting to thumos instead of orgê. Again, one might naturally draw the conclusion that orgê and thumos are being treated as synonyms throughout the chapter.¹¹

The physical account of orgê mentioned in *De an.* 1.1 ('boiling of the blood and hot stuff round the heart') resonates with some points Aristotle makes in *De partibus animalium* (2.4) about the different sorts of blood animals can possess. Aristotle asserts that some animals have fibres (*ines*) in their blood, but others, such as deer and roes, do not. He notes that those animals whose blood is too watery, that is, possesses too few fibres or none at all, are prone to fear and to cowardice (650b27–30), whereas those whose blood has thick and abundant fibres have a more choleric temperament (*thumôdê ethos*) and are prone to outbursts of thumos (*ekstatika dia ton thumon*) (650b33–35). The reason is that fear chills the body whereas thumos heats it, and when water is chilled it becomes congealed, whereas when solids are made hot, they give off more heat than liquids. Thus the fibres, being earthy and solid, 'are turned into so many hot embers in the blood and cause ebullition in the fits of thumos' (651a1–2). On Aristotle's view, this explains why bulls and boars are so prone to thumos (*thumôdeis*) and so excitable (*ekstatikoi*): 'for their blood is exceedingly rich in fibres, and the bull's at any rate coagulates more rapidly than that of any other animal' (651a3–4).¹² And he notes that in general the nature of the blood of animals affects both their temperaments and their sensory faculties in many ways (651a12–13). The idea that physical predispositions to thumos (and fear) might relate to character traits is also manifested in the way in which Aristotle relates thumos to courage, as we shall see in the next section, but the point for now is that we here again have the fear–anger contrast, and the description we find of thumos at the physical level

¹¹ Note also the fact that Aristotle quotes Homer's line about thumos ('Sweeter it is by far than the honeycomb dripping with sweetness, and spreads through the hearts of men' (*Iliad* 18.109)) at several points in his discussions of orgê in *Rh.* (1.11.1370b10–15, 2.2.1378b5–7, cf. 2.2.1379a5).

¹² Cf. *EE* 3.1.1229a25.

seems to be a more detailed version of the material specification of *orgê* we found in *De an.* 1.1.

Before moving on from the connection between *thumos* and *orgê*, we should briefly return to the fact that in *Rh.* 2.2 *orgê* is defined in terms of an *orexis*.¹³ Given the connection between *thumos* and *orgê* that we have developed, one might think that we can now conclusively say that the *orexis* referred to here is *thumos*.¹⁴ But this would be a mistake. If the *orexis* in the definition of *orgê* were *thumos*, *orgê* would turn out to be a *thumos* for revenge in response to a slight. But, as we have seen, *thumos* is *itself* a desire for revenge in response to a perceived slight, so we would get a reduplication problem along the lines Aristotle considers elsewhere (see e.g. *Metaph.* Z.5.1030b28–1031a1): that is, *orgê* would be a desire for revenge in response to a perceived slight [= *thumos*] for revenge in response to a perceived slight, which is clearly nonsense. Instead, the definition of *orgê* should be considered *as also* serving to demarcate the type of *orexis* that *thumos* is. Just as *epithumia* is *orexis* for the pleasant, and *boulêsis* is *orexis* for the good, so too, on this specification of *thumos*, *thumos* is *orexis* for revenge in response to a perceived slight.¹⁵

2. *Thumos* and courage; putative broader notions of *thumos*

In this section, I investigate three contexts in which one might think there is a broader notion of the *thumos* in play in Aristotle than *orgê*: some passages in the *Topics* concerning the *thumoeides*, the *thumotic* capacity or part; a possible role *thumos* plays in the virtue of courage in the ethical treatises; and a putative role for *thumos* in friendship that we find in a passage of the *Politics*. I take them in turn.

¹³ This is in fact not typical of Aristotle's accounts of the individual emotions in *Rh.* 2: the definitions there are predominantly pain- or distress-based, rather than desire-based; see Striker (1996: 291) and Dow (2011).

¹⁴ Cf. Cooper (1996: 249–50).

¹⁵ The relation between *thumos* and emotions will be considered further in Chapter 8.

(a) *The Topics on the thumoeides*

In *Top.* 2.7 (113a36–b1) and *Top.* 4.5 (126a10) Aristotle claims that *orgê* is in the thumoeides.¹⁶ This alone might seem an odd thing to say if thumos and *orgê* were synonymous, since it would then be equivalent to the claim that thumos is in the thumoeides which, though true, would seem to follow as a matter of course given that thumos *just is* the actualisation of the thumoeides. But, in fact, it turns out that Aristotle has quite a permissive notion of what it means for some state to count as ‘in’ (*en*) a part or capacity in this context.¹⁷ A clear indication of this that is relevant now is that in *Top.* 4.5 Aristotle also claims that *fear* (*phobos*) is in the thumoeides (126a8–9). There is no indication that instances of fear could count as actualisations of the thumoeides, so that the thumoeides is the generic part or capacity that, when actualised, can issue in either *orgê* or fear (both of which would then count as thumoi). Indeed, the notion that a fearful or timid reaction to something could be an actualisation of the thumoeides would conflict with just about everything else Aristotle writes about the part or capacity (and, indeed, the Platonic background from which his account emerges). (Further, thumos would involve contradictory physical processes, one chilling (as fear), one heating (as anger); see §1 and the end of §2(b) below.) In fact, the connection between fear and thumos is more subtle and, as we shall soon see, pertains to the relation between thumos and courage. But the key point now is that if there can be other ways in which an activity, such as *orgê* or fear, might be said to be ‘in’ a part or capacity other than simply by being the actualisation of that part or capacity, then Aristotle might after all sensibly claim that *orgê* falls in the thumoeides even if he thinks that *orgê* and thumos are synonymous. For such an assignation could then serve some purpose; for instance, precisely to set up a contrast with those cases in which the state in question is assigned to the part or capacity *for some other reason* than it being the actualisation of the part or capacity itself. ‘*Orgê*

¹⁶ Aristotle sometimes uses thumikon as a replacement for thumoeides, both in *Top.* (e.g. 5.1.129a12, 14–15) and elsewhere (e.g. *De an.* 3.9.432a25, 3.10.433b4).

¹⁷ Besides the point that fear is assigned to the thumoeides, which I shall now discuss, this is also manifest in the fact that Aristotle assigns pleasure *and pain* to the epithumêtikon in *Top.* 4.5 (126a9–10). See [Chapter 4n.5](#).

is in the thumoeides', Aristotle might say, 'indeed, it is the actualisation of that capacity (since orgê is synonymous with thumos), but fear is also in the thumoeides, for it ...' If so, Aristotle's claim that orgê is in the thumoeides is in fact consistent with his treating orgê and thumos as synonyms, and so cannot be taken as strong support for the idea that we have here a notion of thumos that is broader than orgê.¹⁸

(b) *A possible role for thumos in courage*

Why, then, *does* Aristotle place fear in the thumoeides in *Top.* 4.5? It seems likely that this relates to a role he finds for thumos in courage. Let us now consider this. It is first worth remarking on an (ultimately inconclusive) line at the beginning of *NE* 3.10. In turning from courage to temperance, Aristotle writes:

After courage let us speak of temperance; for these seem to be the virtues of the non-rational parts. (1117b23–24)¹⁹

This might seem to be a reference to Plato's *Republic*, in so far as Socrates is there (i.e. in book 4) presented as arguing that there are three parts of the soul, a rational part (*logistikon*) and two non-rational parts, the thumoeides and the epithumêtikon, and explaining the four cardinal virtues (courage, temperance, justice and wisdom) in terms of these parts and their interaction with each other. But although it is hard to see what else the phrase 'the non-rational parts' could pick out besides the epithumêtikon and the thumoeides, Aristotle's remark does not in fact straightforwardly refer to the *Republic*. For although courage is there assigned to the thumoeides, temperance is not assigned to the epithumêtikon but to the harmonious interaction of all three parts (442c10–d3). If we nevertheless assume, as it seems we must, that the non-rational

¹⁸ Of course, *Top.* is usually thought to be an early work, a product of Aristotle's time in the Academy, and so one might not unreasonably think that he here has a broader, Platonic, notion of thumos in mind (even if one doubted this in other cases in Aristotle's 'later' works). All I am arguing is that the passage does not itself supply firm evidence for such a broader notion, given the permissive notion of what it means for some state to count as 'in' a part or capacity that it appears to employ.

¹⁹ Clearly it is *agents* that are courageous and temperate, not parts of souls, so by the genitive *tôn alogôn merôn* ('of the non-rational parts') Aristotle presumably means 'pertaining to the non-rational parts' or 'relating to the non-rational parts' or some such.

parts alluded to are indeed the *epithumêtikon* and *thumoeides*, then could the claim represent Aristotle's own view? This is also problematic. For even if we follow him in putting to one side any difficulties he might have about what 'part' (*morion*, *meros*) actually signifies in this context (see *NE* 1.13.1102a28–32), Aristotle recognises other virtues, besides courage and temperance, that concern non-rational motivations (and so would presumably count as virtues assigned to non-rational 'parts'). Thus the reference to *these* (sc. courage and temperance) being *the* virtues of the non-rational parts would seem overly limiting. Indeed, one of the virtues in *NE*, 'good temper' (*praotês*), is a mean state concerning *orgê*, and involves experiencing *orgê* at the right times, towards the right people, when one ought, as one ought, etc. (see *NE* 4.5). Given the connection between *orgê* and *thumos*, it would seem that if any virtue was going to be *the* virtue that was assigned to the *thumoeides*, this virtue, not courage, would be the prime candidate.²⁰ In fact, though, the line from *NE* 3.10 is inconclusive, for Aristotle writes only that these two (courage and temperance) 'seem' or 'are believed' (*dokein*) to be the virtues of the non-rational parts. He does not say that *he* believes this. And even if Plato did not believe it either, others may have done so, and it may be this that Aristotle is alluding to.

John Cooper (1999a) provides two other reasons for thinking that Aristotle does *not* follow Plato in assigning courage to the *thumoeides*. Ironically, investigating these reasons will actually help us to see why Aristotle *might have* made such an assignation. Cooper's first reason (1999a: 263) is that 'the passion that courage regulates', for Aristotle, 'is not spirited desire in general (nor yet specific instances of it, such as anger) but fear (and confident feelings)'. His second reason (1999a: 263–4) is that to act from *thumos*, for Aristotle, 'is still to act from a *pathos* [an emotion]' (citing *NE* 3.8.1117a9, *EE* 3.1.1229a21), 'not from a choice based on reasoning about what is best', and so actions issuing from *thumos* will not immediately carry with them that 'love of the noble that virtue always connotes'. Both acting from choice

²⁰ Indeed, in the discussion of the virtue in the *EE*, Aristotle repeatedly refers to *thumos* instead of *orgê* (see *EE* 3.3.1231b6–7, 11, 15).

(*prohairesis*) and acting for the sake of the noble (*to kalon*) are preconditions of virtuous action for Aristotle (1999a: 263–4), yet action from *thumos* fails to meet these requirements.

Let me take the second reason first. Cooper is certainly right to claim that Aristotle would not accept that acts *from* *thumos* are courageous ones: in both *NE* 3.8 and *EE* 3.1, he carefully distinguishes acts of true courage from acts performed from *thumos*.²¹ But presumably this is not quite what one would have in mind in holding that Aristotle assigns courage to the *thumoeides*. The point would surely not be that acts issuing from that desire would, by that very fact, be virtuous. Acts issuing from *epithumia* are not, simply by that very fact, temperate, but temperance *is* a virtue that concerns one's *epithumiai*. As we saw in the last chapter, temperance requires the agent to have his *epithumêtikon* aligned with reason, both aiming at 'the noble' (see Chapter 4, §3, for how this should be understood): the temperate agent has *epithumiai* for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, as reason directs (*NE* 3.12.1119b16–18). Given this, temperance might sensibly be considered to be a virtue pertaining to the *epithumêtikon*. Similarly, if courage were assigned to the *thumoeides*, this need not mean that all acts issuing from *thumoi* are, simply by that very fact, courageous.²² Rather, it would mean that the courageous agent would be someone who has his *thumoeides* aligned with reason, both aiming at 'the noble' (*to kalon*), and so has *thumoi* for things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought.²³ Thus the fact that virtuous action must be both chosen and performed for the sake of the noble – however we ultimately explain these notions – does not undermine the idea that they could be assigned to the *epithumêtikon* or the *thumoeides* (after all, virtues of character in general are 'concerned with passions'; see e.g. *NE* 2.6.1106b16). Indeed, Plato did not claim that acts issuing from *thumos* would be, by that very fact, courageous either: he has

²¹ *NE* 3.8.1116b23–1117a9, *EE* 3.1.1129a24–29, 1229b27–32.

²² In speaking of temperance as a virtue of the *epithumêtikon* and courage as a virtue of the *thumoeides*, I do not mean to imply that temperance and courage would be identified with the disposition to experience *epithumiai* or *thumoi* appropriately. Virtue requires a rational component too; see esp. Lorenz (2009).

²³ Cf. Gay (1988).

Socrates claim that it is because of the thumoeides that we call an individual courageous, ‘namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures *the declarations of reason* about what is to be feared (*deinon*) and what is not’ (*Republic* 4.442b11–c3, my emphasis).

This last observation takes me to Cooper’s first reason for denying that Aristotle might hold that courage should be assigned to the thumoeides, namely, that the passion that courage regulates, on Aristotle’s account, is not thumos, but fear (and confidence). For the above passage from the *Republic* clearly reveals that Plato also thought that courage concerned fear (indeed, how could he not?) (see also e.g. *Republic* 3.386a6–b7, 4.429b8–d1), and so if Plato thinks that courage concerns fear and yet assigns the virtue to the thumoeides, why should this not also be the case for Aristotle? The key point to keep in mind in pursuing this idea is the way in which the thumoeides relates to fear for Plato. The passage above makes it clear that it is not that the thumoeides *issues in* fear, but rather that it enables one *to stand up to it*. If Aristotle held the same view this would provide an explanation of why he assigns fear to the thumoeides in *Top.* 4.5: perhaps an emotion can be assigned to a given part not only if the actualisation of that part manifests the emotion in question (as e.g. the actualisation of the thumoeides manifests orgê/thumos), but also if that part is capable of *regulating our responses to* the emotion in question, as the thumoeides is capable of regulating our responses to fear for Plato?

It is at just this juncture that Aristotle’s explicit discussion of thumos in his account of courage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* suddenly takes on a new significance. For although in this chapter (i.e. 3.8) Aristotle is discussing various kinds of pseudo-courageous acts, actions that might appear courageous but in fact are not, his treatment of thumos is very interesting for us. As Cooper pointed out, Aristotle claims that virtue requires that the agent act from choice and for the sake of the noble – and simple action from thumos obviously does not fit these requirements. Nevertheless, when Aristotle claims that courageous men act for the sake of the noble, he adds: ‘but thumos aids them’ (*NE* 3.8.1116b31); and when he concedes that the pseudo-courage that is due to thumos

is the most natural, he adds: ‘and *is* courage if choice and aim be added’ (*NE* 3.8.1117a4–5).²⁴ Our discussion hitherto suggests the following explanation of these remarks: courage concerns standing up to one’s fear; thumos is a natural desire that enables one to stand up to fear; so thumos can be a component of genuine courage, alongside choice and a noble aim.

It might be suggested that the fact that Aristotle claims that the courage that is due to thumos is genuine courage if choice and aim are added does not show that he thinks thumos is an essential ingredient in courage. For sure, *some* non-rational motive may be necessary for genuine courage. Correct choice and aim are not, on Aristotle’s view, sufficient for courageous action either. The akratic agent forms a good choice and yet succumbs to a non-rational desire to act against it. If one’s non-rational motivations are not aligned with one’s choice, or are lacking or ineffectual, one might not be able to stand up to something fearful when one has judged that one should. Alternatively, and this seems to be the case that Aristotle has in mind when he thinks of akrasia with respect to thumos in *NE* 7.6, one might, overcome by one’s non-rational motivations, rush on into something, when one’s rational choice asserts that it would be most sensible to stand back.²⁵ But the fact that *some* non-rational motive is necessary for courage does not rule out the possibility that Aristotle would allow that there could be other non-rational motivations an agent could possess, besides thumos, that when coupled with the correct choice and aim would

²⁴ Cooper (1999a: 264) does acknowledge these points, and even notes that they link Aristotle’s account to Plato’s in ‘interesting ways’, but he does not appear to accept that they require him to reject his first reason for thinking that Aristotle does not assign courage to the thumoeides.

²⁵ Appealing to *NE* 2.3.1104b6–8 (‘he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is courageous, while the man who is pained is a coward’), Charles (1984: 169–76) claims that Aristotle does not apply akrasia and enkrateia to the domain of courage (the man who is pained, but stands his ground, is a coward, not enkratic). But *NE* 2.3.1104b6–8 is perhaps a careless overstatement on Aristotle’s part (he might really want: ‘the man who is pained, and so runs away’), and so Charles might be making too much of it (he provides the same lines as – seemingly his only – justification for this view no less than twelve times in the space of six pages). At any rate these lines needs to be juxtaposed with those from *NE* 7.6 above (that is, given the link between thumos and courage), and also especially *NE* 1.13.1102b26–28, where *both* the temperate and the courageous agent are contrasted with the enkratic agent. See also [Chapter 9](#) below.

result in genuinely courageous acts as well. That said, it is not especially obvious what these might be.²⁶

If Aristotle did think that the appropriate thumotic response was a necessary non-rational ingredient in courage proper, that might be taken to support the notion that here we finally have a notion of thumos which is broader than *orgê*. For, one might argue, it makes no sense to restrict courage to instances in which one is motivated by a desire for revenge owing to a perceived slight. Hence, if thumos supplies the non-rational motive in courage, we need a broader notion of thumos than *orgê*, something closer to ‘spirit’, a notion that involves competitive exertion, a spirit of resistance, resistance to domination, a sense of honour, the will or drive to fight when required, etc.²⁷

However, even this route to a broader notion of thumos is not without difficulties. First, as mentioned, it relies on the notion that thumos is an essential component in genuine courage, not merely a possible component. If thumos is not essential, the argument for a broader use of thumos falls apart, since it could be that thumos only comes into play in precisely those situations in which courageous action is required to exact revenge for a perceived slight. Second, it is notable that in the discussion of thumos and courage in *NE*, and indeed in the *EE* parallel, the account of *orgê* is not

²⁶ In *NE* 3.8 Aristotle suggests that wild beasts attack not just because of thumos, but also under the influence of fear (1116b32–33), i.e. (presumably) lashing out in fearful panic, but it is hard to see how adding choice and aim to lashing out in fearful panic would generate genuine courage. He also claims that adulterers do many daring things because of epithumia (1117a1–2), but one cannot, on Aristotle’s view, add correct choice and aim to epithumia for adulterous acts (*NE* 2.6.1107a15–17), and if one adds correct choice and aim to sexual epithumia, this would make one temperate, not courageous. Perhaps it might be argued that confidence (*tharros*) could supply the requisite non-rational motive? After all, Aristotle claims that courage is a virtue concerned with both fear and confidence, and appears to think that the courageous agent is confident (*NE* 3.7.1116a3–4, 3.8.1117a9–17). However, in both *NE* and *Rh.*, confidence is said to stem from good hope (*elpis*: *NE* 3.7.1116a3–4, *Rh.* 2.12.1389a25–28 (discussed below)), whereas, in *Rh.* at least, it is thumos that specifically enables one to resist fear (2.12.1389a25–28); see below. I discuss the role of confidence in courage in Pearson (2009), and argue that the good hope the courageous agent possesses, from which his confidence stems, does not come from expecting to survive, but from knowing that he is acting for the sake of noble end. Aristotle explicitly claims that those who have good hope (and so are confident) because they expect to survive have another kind of pseudo-courage in *NE* 3.8 (1117a9–22).

²⁷ Cf. Cooper (1999a: 263, 277), Urmson (1990: 168), Kraut (1997: 93).

left behind. When Aristotle claims that wild beasts rush *at those who have wounded them* (NE 3.8.1116b25), it is likely that he is imagining that the wounding made them angry. And when we come to what seems to be his final summary statement at the end of the passage, the previous references to thumos are now clearly understood as manifestations of orgê:

Men, too [i.e. as well as beasts], then, suffer pain when they are angry (*orgizesthai*), and are pleased when they exact their revenge; those who fight (*machomēnoi*) for these reasons, however, though effective in fighting (*machimoi*), are not courageous; for they do not act for the sake of the noble, nor as reason directs, but from emotion (*dia pathos*); they have, however, something akin to courage. (NE 3.8.1117a5–9)

Those acting simply from orgê/thumos have something akin to courage, it seems, because such action is courage proper when choice and aim are added. Equally, in EE 3.1, Aristotle mentions that the (pseudo-) courage of the Celts and other foreigners is due to thumos (1229b28–30), but then immediately goes on to claim that thumos involves a certain pleasure, namely the hope of revenge (*timōria*) (3.1.1229b31–32).

At this point it is instructive to consider a discussion in *Rhetoric* 2.12–14 concerning how different types of character relate to general ages of life: youth (2.12), old age (2.13) and the prime of life (2.14). *Youthful people*, Aristotle claims, are:

high-spirited (*thumikoî*) and quick-spirited (*oxuthumoi*) and such as to follow their orgê; and they give in to their thumos; for owing to their love of honour, they cannot bear being slighted, but become annoyed (*aganaktein*) if they think they have been done an injustice. (1389a9–11)

A little later Aristotle tells us that this trait makes them more courageous (*andreioteroi*) (1389a35–b1) than other age groups. The reactions required for courage, resisting fear and being confident are, in the case of the young, found to be derivative from other states:

for they are high-spirited (*thumōdeis*) and optimistic (*euelpides*), and of these the first prevents fear and the second makes one confident; for no one fears while they are angry (*orgizomenos*), and to hope for something good is a source of confidence. (1389a25–28)

Old people, by contrast:

are cowardly, and are always anticipating danger; unlike that of the young, who are warm-blooded, their temperament is chilly; old age has paved the way for cowardice; fear is, in fact, a form of chill. (2.13.1389b29–32)

And they are:

pessimistic (*duselpides*) about the future; partly through experience – for most things go wrong, or anyhow turn out worse than one expects – and partly because of cowardice. (2.13.1390a4–6)

And their thumoi, we are told, are ‘sudden, but feeble’ (2.13.1390a11).

Naturally enough, *those in their prime* have a character ‘between that of the young and the old, free from the extremes of either,’ since they have ‘neither that excess of confidence (*sphodra tharreïn*) which amounts to rashness (*thrasutês*), nor are too fearful (*lian phobeisthai*)’ (2.14.1390a29–30). Rather:

in regard to thumos and epithumia; they will be courageous as well as temperate, and temperate as well as courageous; these virtues are divided among the young and the old; the young are courageous but self-indulgent, the old temperate but cowardly. (2.14.1390b2–6)

Although Aristotle appears to slide from referring to the young as rash (excessively confident) to characterising them as courageous, it is clear that the role assigned to thumos is to prevent fear. Perhaps the passage, then, lends support to the idea that thumos has an essential role to play in the virtue? Those with too weak or ineffectual thumoi will tend to cowardice, those with thumoi that are too dominant or powerful will tend to rashness, and those that have their thumoi just to the right extent and in the right degree will have a key component of the virtue. But it is also notable that thumos is again repeatedly linked to orgê in the above passages. Owing to their love of honour, the young ‘cannot bear being slighted’, and so if they perceive they have been done an injustice their thumos/orgê is aroused, and this blocks their fear, for ‘no one fears while they are angry’. Orgê/thumos blocks fear, presumably, because one cannot be fully affected by the prospect of danger when one is driven forward by the prospect of a glorious revenge.²⁸

²⁸ In *NE* 3.8, Aristotle asserts that thumos above all things is eager to ‘rush on’ danger, and ‘danger’, of course, is a central cause of fear (*Rh.* 2.5.1382a27–32). It is important for

The physical basis to this incompatibility between thumos/orgê and fear is also alluded to in the passage about the old: the old are cowardly because they are not 'warm-blooded' enough and so are consumed by fear, which is a 'form of chill'. And this brings us back full circle to *NE* 3.8 and, indeed, to the *De partibus animalium* (see end of §1). In *NE* 3.8 Aristotle mentions Homer's phrase, 'his blood boiled', as indicating the stirring and impulse of thumos (1116b27–30). And, in *Part. an.* 2.4, as we saw, Aristotle connects having thick and abundant fibres in one's blood with a choleric temperament (*thumôdê ethos*) and a proclivity to outbursts of thumos (*ekstatika dia ton thumon*) (650b33–35). The fibres, being earthy and solid, 'are turned into so many hot embers in the blood and cause ebullition in the fits of thumos' (651a1–2). And, we noted, in *Part. an.* 2.4 Aristotle holds that in general the nature of the blood of animals affects both their temperaments and their sensory faculties in many ways (651a12–13). This latter point picks up a claim he made earlier in *Part. an.* In 2.2. he claims:

the thicker and the hotter the blood is, the more conducive it is to strength, while in proportion to its thinness and its coldness is its suitability for sensation and intelligence ... of sanguineous animals, those are most practically wise (*phronimôtera*) whose blood is thin and cold. Best of all are those whose blood is hot, and at the same time thin and clear. For such are suited alike for the development of courage and of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*). (648a2–4, 7–11)

It seems that orgê/thumos is a manifestation of hot-bloodedness, and if one is prone to have this emotion that will enable one to resist fear. When such a tendency is coupled with practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), which apparently requires blood that is thin and clear, and so with correct choice and aim, the agent will be truly courageous.

Our discussion in this part has revolved around two key questions. (1) Is thumos required for each instance of truly courageous behaviour? (2) If it is, does this entail that thumos must be

Aristotle's account of courage in *NE* that the courageous agent is still afraid of death – he is aware that he may lose his life, and his death would be a terrible thing given how virtuous he is (*NE* 3.9.1117b10–15) – but perhaps thumos can block the most debilitating features of fear by warming the blood and so preventing the chilling effect of the fear from having full effect? In this way, thumos would be incompatible with fearful behaviour.

being employed in a broader sense than *orgê*. Perhaps the texts do not provide entirely unambiguous answers to these questions, but they seem to point to what might be thought the least satisfactory combination of answers: ‘yes’ to (1), ‘no’ to (2). This combination may seem least satisfactory in so far as it may appear overly restrictive: the courageous agent would have to be angry, and so construe himself as ‘slighted’, in order to have the appropriate non-rational motive; and the courageous agent’s non-rational motive would have to be directed at seeking revenge. But let me close my discussion of the role of *thumos* in courage by considering whether this view, if it is Aristotle’s, really would be as unsatisfactory as it may seem. The first thing to bear in mind is the context of courage, for Aristotle. In *NE* 3.6 Aristotle effectively narrows the field of courage proper to standing up to one’s fear in war (1115a32–35). The demand for courage thus arises in the context of warfare, and there is a human *enemy* that *thumos* can be directed at.²⁹ This distinguishes courage from cases such as standing up to one’s fear of being poor or suffering from a disease, where there is no human enemy that one’s *orgê*/*thumos* could be directed against (1115a10–12). Second, we should emphasise Aristotle’s broad understanding of ‘slight’ (*oligôria*) and ‘revenge’ (*timôria*). We have already mentioned that in *Rh.* he divides ‘slight’ into the three species; contempt (*kataphronêsis*), spite (*epêreasmos*),

²⁹ This might make Aristotle’s account appear unreasonably narrow. But he only maintains that standing up to one’s fear while fighting in war is courage *in the strictest sense* (*kuriôs*: 1115a32). He acknowledges that people apply the term to fearlessness with respect to e.g. poverty, disease or friendlessness, but maintains that they do so ‘in virtue of a similarity’ (*NE* 3.6.1115a19, cf. 3.6.1115a15: ‘in a transferred sense’ (*kata metaphoran*)). Why do these other cases fall short of courage proper? Consider fearlessness in the light of some disease: courageous agents would be fearless in this context too (1115b1), but two crucial conditions for courage in the strictest sense are not met: (a) there is no opportunity of showing prowess or strength (*alkê*) in action and (b) the death will not be noble (1115b4–6). Clearly, it is hard to imagine how dying from a terminal disease can manifest prowess. With (b), the idea seems to be that standing up to the enemy in war is a noble course to aim at, this nobility being reflected back on the agent who pursues it. Although some may be able to bear a disease with dignity and nobility, dying from it can hardly be construed as a noble end they can aim at; they can *die nobly*, but their death is not *for the sake of a noble end*. Some discussion of the narrowness of Aristotle’s notion of courage can be found in e.g. Ross (1995: 213–14), Urmson (1988: 63–4), Welton and Polansky (1995: 98), Pakaluk (2005: 160–4), and Taylor (2006: 178–9).

and insult (*hubris*) (2.2.1378b14–15).³⁰ And, in a passage quoted earlier in *Rh.* 2.12, he claims that people become annoyed simply if they think they have been done an injustice (2.12.1389a11, quoted in full above). Equally, ‘revenge’ (*timôria*) seems just to be some kind of retaliatory action formed in response to such a perceived injustice, aimed at rectifying or redressing it. Third, we should remember that, for Aristotle, since the courageous agent must believe that he is acting for a noble end or cause, he will not be motivated to fight for some (perceived) shameful, or unprovoked, or unnecessary cause. Rather, there must be a (perceived) real need for the battle and justice must appear to be on the side of the courageous agent.³¹ These three points together, I take it, make it much less unpalatable that thumos/orgê might naturally be involved in at least a great many instances of courage, and suggest that for the courageous agent thumos would indeed be an ‘aid’: if there is an enemy that we perceive to have committed some injustice towards us, and this injustice needs to be rectified through warfare, then the non-rational motive backing such action and enabling one to resist the fear could reasonably be thought of as an instance of thumos/orgê.

(c) *The Politics on thumos and friendship*

In *Politics* 7.7 Aristotle makes a curious connection between thumos and friendship. He claims that thumos produces friendliness (*to philêtikon*), for it is the capacity of the soul through which we feel affection (*philein*) (1327b40–1328a1). On the surface this seems very strange indeed. We have seen that thumos, as orgê, is

³⁰ In *Rh.* 2.2 Aristotle elaborates as follows: *contempt* is felt towards what one considers unimportant; *spite* is the thwarting of another man’s wishes, not to get something oneself but to prevent his getting it; and *insult* consists in doing and saying things that cause shame to the victim, not in order that anything may happen to oneself, or because anything has happened to oneself, but simply for the pleasure involved (1378b15–25). The mention in the last two cases to no further end being in view will clearly generate purer cases of anger, but Aristotle’s more general statements do not seem to require this restriction: so long as the end in question is not one that one perceives the agent/polis can justly aim at, then if it has negative effects on you, it can arouse your orgê. But cf. *Rh.* 2.4.1382a3–15 on distinguishing orgê from hatred (*misos*).

³¹ Cf. also *Pol.* 5.10.1311a33–36: ‘Any sort of insult (and there are many) may stir up anger, and when men are angry, they commonly act out of revenge, and not from ambition.’

hot and aggressive, and even when some do find a broader usage of thumos in play in Aristotle's account of courage (signifying something like 'spirit') it would still appear to possess those features. But, in this passage, we seem to be told that it is through thumos that we feel affection, and hence that thumos is productive of friendliness. Even if the envisaged 'affection' is (sometimes) 'hot', one might think that nevertheless we here have a notion of thumos that not only goes well beyond *orgê*, but also beyond 'spirit', and even beyond Plato's characterisations of thumos as 'honour-loving' and 'victory-loving' (*Republic* 8.548c6–7, 550b6–7, 9.586c7–d2).

The first thing to note is that unlike the *Top.* passages we mentioned in §2(a), and the account of thumos in courage we have just considered in §2(b), this seems to be an isolated passage: as far as I can see, Aristotle does not so much as hint at such a view elsewhere. Indeed, what he claims elsewhere suggests that in so far as he thinks that friendship is connected to his specific kinds of desire, it is *boulêsis* or *epithumia* that would be picked out, not thumos.³² (And it is perhaps worth mentioning that this is not the only occasion when *Pol.* stands out with an odd view on desire.³³) And yet it is fascinating that, even here, the connection between thumos and anger is not far away. Aristotle continues:

A sign of this is that one's thumos is roused more against those with whom one is familiar and against friends than against those one does not know, when one takes oneself to be slighted. That is why it is fitting that when Archilochus reproaches his friends, he addresses his thumos: 'It is you who are choked with anger (*apanchein*) against friends.' (1328a1–5, following Kraut's (1997) translation)

A 'sign' (*sêmeion*) of the role of thumos in friendship, apparently, is that one is more prone to anger/thumos towards those with whom one is familiar. This thought *is* repeated elsewhere (see e.g. *Rh.* 2.2.1379b2–4: 'we are angrier with our friends than with other people because we feel that our friends ought to treat us well and not badly'). Since we care more about the opinions of our friends, and since we think that they ought to treat us a

³² See the passage from *EE* 7.2 we discussed in Chapter 3, §3(a), on whether the object of love or affection is what we have an *epithumia* or a *boulêsis* for (cf. also *Top.* 4.5.126a12–13). See also e.g. *Rh.* 2.4.1380b36–1381a1, *NE* 8.3.1156a9–10.

³³ See *Pol.* 7.15.1334b22–25, discussed in Chapter 7, n.1, below.

certain way, we will be more prone to anger when we are slighted by them: *they*, of all people, we think, should *not* be slighting us. But it is clearly one thing to claim that our thumotic reactions will vary with the status of our relationships and quite another to insist that this means that thumos is *the* capacity that produces friendship.³⁴ Nothing Aristotle says here supports the notion that thumos is the ‘cement’, as it were, that binds friends together, and it is not clear how he envisages it might do this; indeed, as mentioned, elsewhere he ascribes this feature to the other species of orexis. Immediately following the passage just quoted from *Pol.*, Aristotle continues:

Both ruling and being free derive from this capacity in all cases, for thumos is a ruling element and resists domination. (1328a6–7)³⁵

This addition does not seem to relate directly to the putative role of thumos in friendship either, but it may nonetheless suggest a broader notion of thumos than *orgê*. For neither desiring to rule, nor resisting having one’s freedom restricted, directly entails that one perceives an injustice has been done towards one (for with the latter one may have committed an offence). Rather, we here seem close to Plato’s notion of thumos as something that involves a love of honour or a love of victory.

I am not claiming, then, that there is not a single passage in Aristotle in which one could make a case that he has in mind a broader use of thumos than that in which it signifies *orgê*. But I am claiming that these are rather isolated atypical cases, that the *orgê* signification is paramount for him, and that the *orgê* signification is usually in his mind even when the context initially invites a broader signification.

3. Thumos and ‘the noble’ (*to kalon*)

At least going back to Burnyeat (1980: 84), a number of commentators have claimed that thumos in Aristotle has some special

³⁴ See also Kraut (1997: 95).

³⁵ Cf. Aristotle’s claim that anger motivates us to attack tyrannies (5.10.1312b17–34, cf. 5.11.1315a24–31).

relation to nobility/justice/dignity.³⁶ Now of course this is in part simply a consequence of the fact that these commentators see the Platonic notion of *thumos* as ‘honour-loving’ in some of Aristotle’s remarks. But the idea is taken in a certain direction by John Cooper (1999a) that must, in my view, be particularly resisted. In *NE* 2.3, Aristotle claims that there are three objects of choice (*hairesis*): the noble (*to kalon*), the advantageous (*to sumpheron*), and the pleasant (*to hêdu*) (1104b30–31). Cooper (1999a: 265–6, and n.21) argues that we should view ‘the advantageous’ here as equivalent to ‘the good’; and so since, as we have seen, *epithumia* is for the pleasant, and, as we shall consider in detail in the next chapter, *boulêsis* is for the good, that just leaves the noble. Cooper’s suggestion is that this should be considered to be the object of *thumos*. We would then have a neat parallelism: the three objects of choice in *NE* 2.3 would line up directly with the three kinds of desire that Aristotle recognises.³⁷

In fact, Cooper himself acknowledges some key problems with this reading. First, there is a distinct lack of textual evidence supporting the notion that Aristotle thinks that *thumos* has the noble as its correlative object, in a way parallel to *boulêsis* and the good, and *epithumia* and pleasure. As we have seen, Aristotle almost always has in mind his account of *orgê*, a desire for revenge owing to a perceived slight, when he considers the desire. Cooper replies to this objection as follows:

perhaps if we found as natural and compelling as Plato and Aristotle and their contemporaries must have done the idea of spirited desires as a distinct and special *kind* of desires, aimed at active agency and competitive self-promotion, we would not be making these demands [for a more explicit acknowledgment of the role of *thumos* in moral virtue via its connection to the noble] in the first place. Perhaps then we would have understood Aristotle in this way from the beginning, without having to be told explicitly at every point about the special role played by spirited desire in the construction of moral virtue. (1999a: 279–80)

But this is unsatisfactory. Although Plato and Aristotle clearly do find it natural to recognise *thumos* as a ‘distinct’ and ‘special’ kind of desire, Cooper wants to argue for a very *specific interpretation*

³⁶ Besides Cooper, who I shall now discuss, see also Broadie (1991: 269, 2002: 56), Lear (2004: 137–46) and Grönroos (2007).

³⁷ Grönroos (2007) and Lear (2004: 137n.33) uncritically follow Cooper in this respect.

of Aristotle's understanding of thumos and its role in virtue, and maintains that Aristotle does not follow Plato in this respect (see 1999a: 263, 276). He thus appears to want to claim (i) that Aristotle has a novel interpretation of thumos; (ii) that this interpretation is not explicit in Aristotle's texts; and also (in the passage above) (iii) that we should nonetheless presume that Aristotle understood thumos this way 'from the beginning'. But these claims do not sit well together. And given the importance of the view Cooper thinks he is ascribing to Aristotle, and the size of the corpus, it is nonetheless amazing that the role did not crop up explicitly, even in passing, if Aristotle held this view. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it would be an astonishing silence if Aristotle failed to mention such a feature of his account, given that aiming for the noble is a key criterion by which he demarcates truly virtuous action.

Second (1999a: 266, 276), *epithumia* is always for what appears pleasant, *boulêsis* is always for what appears good, but surely thumos cannot always be for what appears noble? For one thing, non-rational animals have *thumoi*,³⁸ and yet presumably are incapable of having things appear noble to them;³⁹ for another, as we have seen, Aristotle repeatedly characterises the object of thumos (as *orgê*) as revenge or retaliation (*timôria*). Cooper's reply to this objection is to insist that he is only claiming that the noble is the object of thumos 'in the specific case of the morally virtuous person', for 'spirited desire is the desire through which the morally virtuous person is primarily motivated to pursue *to kalon*, the noble or fine or beautiful' (1999a: 266, see also 276). But then the parallelism between the three desires and the three objects of choice in *NE* 2.3 is not there after all, and the neatness of Cooper's account has gone. For non-virtuous as well as virtuous agents, *epithumia* is always for what appears pleasant, and *boulêsis* is always for what appears good (these being the correlative objects of the desires); but only morally virtuous agents have their *thumoi*

³⁸ See *NE* 3.1.1111a24–26, 3.2.1111b12–13: 'common to non-rational creatures (*ta aloga*)', *EE* 2.10.1225b26–27; and by implication from the examples in *NE* 3.8.1116b31–1117a3 and *EE* 3.1.1229a24–27.

³⁹ Cf. *NE* 2.3.1104b34–35: where pleasure as an object seems to be distinguished from the noble and the advantageous on the ground that it is shared by other animals.

directed at the noble, not every agent. In order to be parallel to the other desires, thumos needs a general end that fits all cases and, since the desire is shared by non-rational creatures, this end ought to be one that non-rational creatures can desire, even if in rational creatures it may be grasped in some more complex guise (just as the end of *epithumia* (in the broad sense), viz. pleasure, is sharable with non-rational creatures, but in rational creatures this end may be desired in some form that non-rational animals would be incapable of appreciating).⁴⁰

Besides the problems that Cooper himself acknowledges, there are others. For example, I believe that *boulêsis* can have the noble (*to kalon*) as its object (see next chapter), and if this is correct, the division that Cooper provides is flawed in another respect: the sense in which *boulêsis* aims at the good includes both the advantageous (*sumpheron*) and the noble (and other ends besides).⁴¹ Again, as we have mentioned, in *NE* 3.8 Aristotle considers various types of pseudo-courageous actions, acts which may seem to be truly courageous acts, but which in fact are not. The full list is: acts stemming from political courage, acts owing to experience, acts from thumos, acts by sanguine people, and acts from

⁴⁰ As we have seen, Aristotle clearly thinks that non-rational animals can undergo thumoi (see e.g. *Part. an.* 2.4.651a3–4, 650b33–35, *NE* 3.8.1116b31–35, *NE* 3.1.1111b1–2, and also the fact that he refers to the desire in general as non-rational (see Chapter 7 for references)). How should the thumoi of non-rational animals be understood? In *NE* 3.8, Aristotle refers to wild beasts attacking because they have been wounded (1116b31–32), and this does indeed seem to be a fairly common phenomenon among non-rational animals: if left alone they may not bother us but, once irritated or attacked, a desire can arise in them to inflict some harm in return. Given that non-rational creatures lack rational capacities, presumably such desires will function by employing perceptual phantasia instead of reason (note that in *NE* 7.6 Aristotle allowed that phantasia can inform us we have been insulted or slighted: 1149a32–33). The animal might, then, construe (through phantasia) activities of some agent as aggressive, and in turn form a desire to inflict harm on the aggressor. If we take ‘slight’ and ‘retaliation’ broadly, we could think of such cases as involving the animal perceiving a slight and being motivated to retaliate in return.

⁴¹ See also Price (2001: 49). Indeed, since on Cooper’s view *boulêsis* aims at what is good in a way that excludes the noble, whenever he finds Aristotle referring to a desire for something noble (at least *de dicto*), this must be a thumos. So when Aristotle writes e.g. ‘virtuous actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble. Therefore the liberal man will give for the sake of the noble, and rightly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving’ (4.1.1120a23–26), if Aristotle has a *de dicto* motive in mind, Cooper would have to claim that the liberal man’s desire to hand over some cash to someone *as noble* is motivated by a thumos.

ignorance. But although Aristotle writes, as we have seen, that thumos is important and ‘helps’ brave men act for the sake of the noble (*kalon*) (1116b30–31) (more on the latter below), it is actually political courage that we are told is due to desire for a noble object (*dia kalou orexin*)⁴² and so most like true courage (1116a27–29), not acts owing to thumos.

On my view, thumos can only ‘aim’ at the noble in the same way that epithumia can. We saw in the last chapter (§3) that Aristotle holds that epithumia aims at an end in two different senses; a *de dicto* sense in which a desire aims at an end under a specific desirability feature sought; and a *de re* sense in which it aims not at an end under a specific desirability feature sought, but under some description that purports to state how things actually are. And I suggested that when Aristotle claims that the epithumêtikon of the virtuous agent aims at the noble, he is using a *de re* notion of ‘aim’, not a *de dicto* notion: bodily pleasure is the *de dicto* aim of the temperate agent’s epithumiai, but since he has a good character, and only has epithumiai appropriately, his epithumiai aim at what is noble in the *de re* specification, that is, they aim at pleasures that it is *in fact* noble to aim at, even though they do not aim at them *as* noble. So too, I suggest, Aristotle would claim that the thumoeides of the virtuous agent can only be said to aim at the noble in a *de re* sense, not a *de dicto* sense. Revenge or retaliation, we have seen, is the core *de dicto* aim of an agent’s thumos, but since the thumoi of courageous agents are those that it would be appropriate to have, and reflect his good character, these desires would aim at what is noble in the *de re* specification, that is, at what is *in fact* noble, even though they do not aim at it *as* noble.⁴³

⁴² For such, Aristotle tells us, is honour (*timê*), which, as he sees it, is one of the prime motivators of political courage. In line with this, it is perhaps somewhat odd that Cooper thinks that the courageous agent’s thumos aims at the noble, given that he argues that this is one of the chief reasons that acts from thumos cannot be courageous: virtuous acts are for *to kalon*, whereas acts from thumos are just *dia pathos* (1999a: 263–4).

⁴³ So too, the thumoi that are manifested in the anger-virtue discussed in *EE* 3.3 (*NE* 4.5) will, in the virtuous case, aim at the noble in the *de re* sense (they are appropriate to have and in accordance with nobility), not in the *de dicto* sense (i.e. they do not involve desiring the end *as* noble). Alternatively put, virtuous epithumiai and thumoi aim at the noble (*de re*) when they are in accordance with right reason (*orthos logos*) (*NE* 2.3.1104b32–34, 6.1.1138b18–34, 6.13.1144b21–30, cf. 3.12.1119b15–18); cf. Gómez-Lobo (1995).

As I see it, each of Aristotle's three species of orexis can aim at the noble *de re*, but only boulêsis, not epithumia or thumos, can aim at it *de dicto*. Only boulêsis, as I see it, is able to do this (see next chapter). And note that when Aristotle claims in *NE* 3.8 that courageous men act for the sake of the noble, 'but thumos aids them' (1116b30–31) this fits well with the account I am offering: the thumoi of virtuous agents aid them to act for the sake of the noble because they are directed at noble ends *de re*. In this respect they are directly analogous to the epithumiai of the temperate agent, which direct the temperate agent to noble ends (*de re*) owing to the fact that they only direct him to pleasures that it would be noble to pursue (see [Chapter 4](#), §3).

However, in spite of my argument thus far, and my insistence that Cooper goes too far in claiming that thumos can take the noble as its direct object, I still think that there is, in fact, something to be said for the more general claim that thumos has some connection to the noble that epithumia does not. It does so, though, in a way that is consistent with the fact that it can only aim at the noble *de re*. The connection in question is most explicit in *NE* 7.6, a chapter in which Aristotle provides a series of reasons to think that akrasia with respect to thumos is less disgraceful than akrasia with respect to epithumia. Given that disgrace (*aischron*) can be considered the opposite of the noble (see e.g. *NE* 2.3.1104b30–32), these reasons lend support to the idea that thumos is inherently more prone to be directed towards noble ends (*de re*) than epithumia. The most interesting reason Aristotle provides is his first, part of which we have quoted in §1 above. In full, the passage runs:

Thumos seems to listen to reason (*logos*) to some extent, but to mishear it, as do hasty servants who run out before they have heard the whole of what one says, and then muddle the order, or as dogs bark if there is but a knock at the door, before looking to see if it is a friend; so thumos by reason of the warmth and hastiness of its nature, though it hears, does not hear an order, and springs to take revenge. For reason or phantasia informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and thumos, reasoning as it were (*hōsper sullogisamenos*) that anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightway; while epithumia, if reason or perception merely says that an object is pleasant, springs to the enjoyment of it. Therefore thumos obeys reason in a sense, but epithumia does not. It is therefore more disgraceful; for the

man who is akratic in respect of thumos is in a sense conquered by reason, while the other is conquered by epithumia and not by reason. (1149a25–1149b3)⁴⁴

Thumos appears to listen to/obey reason ‘in a sense’ (*pôds*), whereas epithumia does not, and therefore thumotic akrasia seems less disgraceful than epithumotic akrasia since it involves being conquered by reason ‘in a sense’ (1149a25–1149b3). A full discussion of this passage is not possible here, but let me just briefly state how I understand it.⁴⁵ As I read the passage, Aristotle thinks that thumos itself involves listening to/obeying reason ‘in a sense’ in so far as it incorporates something analogous to an actual reasoning stage (it is *as if* it moved from registering a slight to commanding revenge, *via the premise*: ‘anything like this must be fought against’) in a way that implicitly makes reference to a complex (i.e. structured) *part* of the fully rational response (where the fully rational response would be something like: ‘if you have been slighted, get revenge for that (because slights ought to be resisted), *but only if the situation warrants it overall*’, or some such; and thumos misses out the italicised section). This sets thumos apart from epithumia, since epithumia does not involve an ‘as if’ reasoning stage (it moves straight from the prospective pleasure to commanding pursuit), nor accordingly does it pick out a complex part of a fully rational response. Aristotle’s thought is then that in so far as the thumotic akratic is conquered by reason in this sense, although he actually goes against the full instruction of reason (he is akratic after all), his action is *closer* to the fully rational response than an action which fails to incorporate any such partially-/quasi-rational response, as with the epithumetic akratic. And then Aristotle’s idea must be that acting in a way that involves being in a sense conquered by reason is less disgraceful than failing to do even that. In this way it is built into thumos that it is more inherently directed (*de re*) at noble ends than epithumia. And this is why, when thumos and epithumia make one act against reason (as in akrasia), the thumotically motivated action is still

⁴⁴ Burnyeat (1980: 84) focuses on this passage, and I believe he is right to do so, but I think he reads it as indicating that thumos can take ‘what is noble and just ... honour and self-esteem’ as *de dicto* objects, whereas I do not think that the passage suggests this.

⁴⁵ I provide a full discussion in Pearson (2011b).

less disgraceful than its epithumetic cousin. But note that, contra Cooper, thumos possesses its special connection to the noble not by actually aiming *de dicto* at the noble – indeed, Aristotle explicitly states that it aims at revenge – but owing to the fact that it is built into this desire that it corresponds more closely to a fully rational response than epithumia. Nevertheless, the weaker view that thumos has some relation to the noble that epithumia lacks does seem to be vindicated by this passage.

Conclusion

Commentators in general have had less to say about thumos, often translating it without further discussion as ‘spirit’ or ‘passion’. In §1 I showed that Aristotle often uses thumos and orgê as synonyms, and even when orgê is not explicitly mentioned his usage of thumos is frequently so closely tied to his official account of orgê in *Rh.* 2.2 (a desire for revenge owing to a perceived slight), or to the physical account of orgê we find in *De an.* 1.1 (boiling of the blood), that it seems most likely that he has orgê in mind. In §2 I considered some putative broader usages of thumos. I focused mainly on a possible role for thumos in the virtue of courage, suggested by *NE* 3.8 and *Rh.* 2.12–14. These texts make it plausible to think (contra Cooper) that there is a sense in which courage could, in at least many instances, be assigned to the thumoeides; but not because acts issuing from thumos would *eo ipso* count as virtuous, but rather owing to fact that possessing the appropriate thumoi may well be a key ingredient in at least many courageous actions. And yet it also seems that, even in this context, the orgê signification of thumos is close to Aristotle’s mind, but given the context of courage, and Aristotle’s broad significations of ‘slight’ and ‘revenge’/‘retaliation’, this need not be as unpalatable as it may seem. In §3 I considered the notion that thumos possesses some special relation to the noble that epithumia does not. I argued against Cooper’s suggestion that we should view the noble as a correlative object of thumos, parallel to the good for boulêsis, and pleasure for epithumia. In fact, both epithumia and thumos can aim at the noble *de re*, and will do so in virtuous agents, but neither of these desires aims

at the noble *de dicto*. Nevertheless, I also suggested that *NE* 7.6 does provide some justification for the view that there is an inherent connection between thumos and the noble that is lacking in epithumia. On my view, this is consistent with the aforementioned restriction to the *de dicto* aim of thumos.

Thumos, then, on Aristotle's account, seems primarily to represent *orgê*, a desire for revenge in response to a perceived slight. Even accepting that 'revenge' and 'slight' should be understood very broadly, thumos might thus seem to represent quite a narrow category of desires. Indeed, one might wonder how Aristotle would characterise desires that stem from other emotional states, or even other desiderative responses we may have to distress at being slighted. I shall return to such questions in [Chapter 8](#). In the next chapter I turn to consider Aristotle's third and final species of desire, *boulêsis*.

CHAPTER 6

SPECIES OF DESIRE III: BOULËSIS (GOOD-BASED DESIRE)

Aristotle's third and final species of orexis is boulêsis.¹ Boulêsis is distinguished from the other species of orexis by its connection to the 'good' – it is orexis for the good.² I argued in [Chapter 3](#) that Aristotle must think that the notion of good that picks out the boulêton is narrower than the notion of good that corresponds to the orekton in general. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate what this notion of good is. On the face of it, this narrow notion may pick out one specific kind of good or it may pick out a plurality of goods grouped in some way (cf. the question of whether epithumia is tied to bodily pleasures or can be for non-bodily pleasures as well, discussed in [Chapter 4](#), and the question of whether thumos can have objects beyond revenge, discussed in [Chapter 5](#)). For those who think that Aristotle intends to link boulêsis to a single good, the good generally proposed is eudaimonia, a human being's overall good or what would make his life eudaimôn, flourishing, as a whole.³ In the present chapter I consider several different versions of this view, but ultimately conclude that each is untenable. The problems that such accounts face instead point towards the notion that a plurality of goods can count as the object of boulêsis. As with Aristotle's other desires, in accordance with my remarks in the Introduction (§2), the key boulêsis terminology (boulêsis, boulêseis, boulêton, boulêta) will remain untranslated and unitalicised.

¹ See e.g. *De an.* 2.3.414b2, 3.9.432b3–7, *De motu an.* 6.700b22, 7.701a36–701b1, *EE* 2.7.1223a26–27, 2.10.1225b24–26, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a1–4; cf. *NE* 3.2.1111b11.

² See e.g. *NE* 3.4.1111a23–24, 5.9.1136b7–8, *EE* 7.2.1235b23, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a3–4, *Top.* 6.8.146b5–6, 146b37–147a1; cf. *EE* 2.7.1223b6–7, 32–33, *EE* 2.10.1227a18–31.

³ See e.g. Anscombe (1965: 155), Nussbaum (1978: 336), Irwin (1980b: 257, 1988: 337, 598n.22); Mele (1984: 145), Reeve (1992: 88), Meyer (1993: 25), Cooper (1999a: 269; cf. 1999b: 242). As mentioned in the Introduction (§2), I shall resist translating or italicising 'eudaimonia'.

I. An outline of accounts linking boulësis to eudaimonia

Aristotle appears to want to argue for a particular account of what eudaimonia is for a human agent (in esp. *NE* I and 10). It is notoriously difficult to pin down what this conception is – whether it requires an inclusive range of goods, or there is a dominant one; how much it depends on external goods, or on fortune, or on longevity; and, indeed, whether or not one can be said to have possessed a eudaimôn life in one’s own lifetime. Furthermore, it is of course disputed whether Aristotle consistently holds one conception of eudaimonia or has two or more conflicting conceptions. Such issues are not directly relevant to my inquiry. If Aristotle thinks that the object of boulësis is eudaimonia, he cannot mean that all boulëseis aim at *his own* conception of what would make a life go best. This would have the absurd consequence that only agents who happened to have Aristotle’s specific conception of what makes a life go best would possess boulëseis, and yet Aristotle makes it clear that virtuous and vicious agents alike experience the desire (see e.g. *NE* 3.4). Thus, if in linking boulësis to the good Aristotle intends to link boulësis to eudaimonia, he must instead mean to link boulësis to *the agent’s conception of* eudaimonia, whatever that may be. Boulësis will be for the good, on this account, because, in every case, an agent’s boulëseis will be tied to his or her conception of eudaimonia or overall good.⁴ In order to appraise this view we must specify more clearly (a) what we mean by ‘an agent’s conception of eudaimonia’ and (b) how a state such as boulësis might be tied to such a conception.

(a) An agent’s conception of eudaimonia

By ‘an agent’s conception of eudaimonia’ we most likely have one of two things in mind.⁵ We might mean an *explicitly grasped or cognised* conception, a conception the agent is capable of referring

⁴ I shall address a consideration that has been taken to favour this view, which appeals to Aristotle’s notion of a deliberative akratic (*NE* 6.9.1142b18–20), in §4 below.

⁵ Cf. Broadie (1991: 122n.42, point (1)).

to and thinking about.⁶ By this we are referring to a specification that is suitably substantial (although not necessarily complicated), not merely some purely formal or empty characterisations of what the agent takes his eudaimonia to be. ‘I want my life to go well’ or ‘I want to succeed in life’ will not count as specifying an explicit conception of eudaimonia because such characterisations, without further elaboration, do not succeed in spelling out the agent’s conception of eudaimonia in any meaningful manner. Whereas ‘I must always act so as to maximise bodily pleasure’ could pick out an explicit conception of eudaimonia since, even though it is a very simplistic specification, such a conception has enough content to be contrasted with other conceptions and could, for example, help explain someone’s actions or choices.⁷ In short, if an agent has an explicit conception of eudaimonia he grasps a substantial spelt-out account of what he takes his overall good to be.

Alternatively, by an agent’s conception of eudaimonia we might mean to refer to (what I shall call) an *embodied* conception of eudaimonia. The easiest way to grasp this notion of a conception of eudaimonia is to align it with the agent’s character. An agent’s character disposes him to act, undergo certain emotional states, choose, plan, and so on. Together these will amount to a more or less coherent conception of eudaimonia, and will do so regardless of whether the agent has any kind of explicit grasp of that conception.⁸ Even on this notion, agents may fail to act in accordance

⁶ Cooper (1986: 96–8) and Kenny (1979: 150–1) are examples of commentators who employ the notion of an explicit conception of eudaimonia in explaining Aristotle’s views.

⁷ Although exactly what makes a conception ‘suitably complex’, on such a view, would no doubt require careful investigation, this issue is not crucial for my purposes.

⁸ Wiggins (1980a) and McDowell (e.g. 1980, 1996a) are examples of commentators who employ such a notion of a conception of eudaimonia in explaining Aristotle’s views. Wiggins writes: ‘For a man to embrace a specific conception of eudaimonia just is for him to become susceptible to certain distinctive and *distinctively compelling* reasons for acting in certain sorts of ways’ (1980a: 252, emphasis in original). McDowell writes: ‘the content of the end cannot be pinned down in abstraction from the ability to put it into practice in recognising specific occasions for action ... there is nothing for grasp of the content of the universal to be except a capacity to read the details of situations in the light of a way of valuing actions into which proper upbringing has habituated one’ (1996a: 23). McDowell (1996a: 24–6) insists, contra Broadie (1991: Ch. 4), that the agent’s conception of eudaimonia can still be ‘viewed’ even though it cannot be specified in universal terms; see also Price (2011: Ch.3.B.VIII).

with their conception of eudaimonia – or at least can do so in so far as they are able on occasion to act ‘out of character’.⁹

*(b) How a state such as boulêsis may be tied
to an agent’s conception of eudaimonia*

Next consider how boulêsis might be tied to an agent’s conception of eudaimonia. Again, there seem to be two ways that this could occur. First, a boulêsis might *directly refer* to the agent’s conception of eudaimonia. Suppose an agent has an explicit conception of eudaimonia that states that he should always act so as to maximise bodily pleasure, then one way in which this agent’s boulêsis might be tied to that conception is if each such desire makes direct reference to it. On this view, everything that the agent has a boulêsis for would be desired as conducive to or part of that conception of eudaimonia, namely, maximising bodily pleasure. Referring accounts of the connection between boulêsis and the agent’s conception of eudaimonia, as I intend them, require the agent to possess an explicit conception of eudaimonia: what the agent’s boulêsis directly refer to is the agent’s explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia.¹⁰

The second way boulêsis might be tied to an agent’s conception of eudaimonia is if they *reflect* the agent’s conception of eudaimonia. On this view, boulêsis need not make direct reference to the agent’s conception of eudaimonia – indeed, they can

⁹ Although it is one or the other of these significations of ‘an agent’s conception of eudaimonia’ that has generally been employed by commentators, on my specifications it will be possible for an agent (i) to have an explicit grasp of his embodied conception of eudaimonia (i.e. by having an explicit cognition of the conception of eudaimonia that happens to be embodied in his character states), and (ii) to have an explicit conception of eudaimonia that conflicts with his embodied conception of eudaimonia (construing his eudaimonia to be a certain way, when his character betrays this). (Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* might be an example of the latter: he seems to have had an explicit conception of his eudaimonia as a great man, a Napoleon, someone who could commit murder if necessary to get a foot up the ladder. But ultimately his embodied conception of eudaimonia, as manifested in his character, did not match this: he reacted adversely to the action he thought he must do (murder the old woman), and ended up giving himself away and, ultimately, turning himself in.)

¹⁰ This seems to be Anscombe’s interpretation (1965: 155). Cf. also Nussbaum (1978: 335–6), Irwin (1980b: 257), and Reeve (1992: 88).

have any number of specific ends – just so long as they reflect that conception, that is, flow or stem from it in some way.¹¹ In contrast to referential accounts, reflective accounts are compatible with either explicit or embodied conceptions of eudaimonia. Suppose an agent's explicit conception of eudaimonia incorporates a view of what sport he plays on the weekend when certain weather conditions hold; e.g. he thinks it best to play cricket if it is sunny, football when it is raining, and squash if it is snowing. If, when waking up on a glorious summer's day, the agent formed a *boulêsis* to play cricket that accorded with this explicit conception, but did not make direct reference to it, this would be an instance of a desire that *reflects* an agent's explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia, rather than directly refers to it. If, by contrast, the preference for particular sports in certain weather conditions were only an aspect of the agent's embodied conception of eudaimonia, not something he had an explicit grasp of, then the agent's *boulêsis* would reflect his embodied conception of eudaimonia.

We are left, then, with three accounts of how *boulêsis* could be linked or connected to the agent's conception of eudaimonia. This desire might:

- (1) make direct reference to the agent's explicit conception of eudaimonia
- (2) reflect the agent's explicit conception of eudaimonia
- (3) reflect the agent's embodied conception of eudaimonia.

2. Reflective views linking *boulêsis* to an agent's conception of eudaimonia

Let me first consider reflective views, and take both (2) and (3) together. These views share the feature that they hold that in linking *boulêsis* to the good Aristotle means that all *boulêseis* reflect that agent's conception of eudaimonia. They differ in that (2) asserts that the agent's *boulêseis* reflect the agent's explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia, whereas (3) maintains that

¹¹ Mele (1984: e.g. 145) seems to hold a reflective view. Cf. also Irwin (1988: 598n.22: 'express').

the agent's boulêseis reflect the agent's embodied conception of eudaimonia. Although they differ in this respect, the considerations I shall adduce shall focus on what they share in common: the fact that they are reflective views.

(a) *First problem: akrasia and idle wishes in tension*

As we noted earlier in this book (see [Chapter 1](#), §5 (end)), one kind of boulêsis Aristotle recognises is idle wishes. He claims:

choice cannot relate to impossibles, and if anyone said he chose them he would be thought silly; but there may be a boulêsis for impossibles, e.g. for immortality. (*NE* 3.2.1111b20–23; cf. *EE* 2.10.1225b32–35)

It seems to be built into Aristotle's example that the agent recognises that the object of his boulêsis is fanciful: it is, after all, something he accepts he cannot choose.¹² If so, why must such a desire line up with (be reflective of) the agent's moral character or conception of eudaimonia? Addressing this issue, Mele (1984) writes:

if [Aristotle] is not simply employing 'wish' [Mele's translation for boulêsis] in a sense other than his technical one here, there are undoubtedly many possible virtuous or vicious sources for such wishes. (146)

Mele's first option – Aristotle is using boulêsis in a non-technical sense – will not do. The example is provided in a chapter (*NE* 3.2) in which Aristotle has employed his threefold division of desire into epithumia, thumos and boulêsis, and in which he is addressing the question whether choice and boulêsis are the same thing. He thus clearly has the 'technical' use of boulêsis in mind. Hence, Mele's second option – such boulêseis are still reflective – is the one he must stick with. We must, then, insist that such boulêseis are nevertheless reflective of the agent's conception of eudaimonia. One could achieve this, I suppose, if one had a fairly permissive notion of what it was for a desire to 'reflect' an agent's conception of eudaimonia. Perhaps living a long life is a key part of Bob's conception of eudaimonia (whether explicitly grasped

¹² In the parallel *EE* passage Aristotle asserts that no one would choose to do such impossible things 'unless ignorant of the impossibility' (*EE* 2.10.1225b34–35) but, it seems, they can still have boulêseis for such things without such ignorance.

or embodied). Given a generous notion of 'reflect', the wish for immortality could perhaps be said to reflect this feature of Bob's conception of eudaimonia. He may recognise that immortality is impossible, but still the desire for immortality may loosely reflect his conception of eudaimonia.

The problem with this approach is that we risk making the notion of 'reflect' too permissive. It must be possible, on reflective views, for an agent to *fail* to act in a way that reflects their conception of eudaimonia (and to do so voluntarily). The akratic agent acts against his choice, and his choices are generally indicative of his moral character, so the akratic agent acts against his moral character.¹³ This is not in itself a problem for reflective accounts that link *boulêsis* to agents' conceptions of eudaimonia, since the akratic agent's akratic behaviour is at the service of an *epithumia*, not a *boulêsis* (see e.g. *NE* 3.2.1111b13–14). But the fact that reflective views have to allow that agents can voluntarily act *out of* character does require that the notion of 'reflecting' cannot become so permissive that it allows that *any* desire the agent possesses is reflective in the required way. Otherwise, the akratic agent's *epithumiai* would be reflective of his conception of eudaimonia, and 'reflecting the agent's conception of eudaimonia' would not isolate the sense in which *boulêsis* (in contrast to Aristotle's other species of *orexis*) is connected to the good. Perhaps living an active and fulfilling sex life is a key part of Bill's (explicit or embodied) conception of eudaimonia, but perhaps being faithful to his wife is also a key feature. If Bill is virtuous, these features will be combined: Bill will desire an active sex life with his wife. But if Bill is akratic, he may find himself desiring

¹³ For the notion that choices are indicative of moral character see e.g. *NE* 3.2.1111b5–6, 1112a2, 6.2.1139a33–34 (the qualification 'generally' shall be explained below). One difficulty that needs to be acknowledged is that Aristotle seems to think of (at least some) akratics as serially akratic, rather than just performing an occasional akratic action out of character. With such agents, the tendency to perform akratic actions might appear to be embodied in their character. Nevertheless, Aristotle also appears to think in general that the akratic agent, viz. in contrast to the vicious agent, acts against his choice, is subject to regrets, and can change (presumably firstly into an *enkratic* agent) (see esp. *NE* 7.8 for all these points), and so, it seems, the (serial) akratic agent does not *identify* with the actions he akratically performs in some important respect. Thus, so long as his conception of eudaimonia and his character can be specified in a way that excludes actions that he will subsequently regret in this way, the account can accommodate serial akratics.

to have sex with his neighbour's wife. Reflective views must say that such a desire does not reflect Bill's conception of eudaimonia, but instead conflicts with it. But now Mele's strategy for dealing with idle wishes rears its ugly head. If we allow that idle wishes count as reflecting the agent's conception of eudaimonia in the loose way we considered with Bob, it may seem difficult simultaneously to rule out the akratic agent's unruly epithumiai from also being so reflective. Reflective views need to specify a notion of 'reflect' that entails that Bill's akratic desire *fails* to reflect *his* conception of eudaimonia (even though an active sex life *is* part of his eudaimonia), while at the same time allowing that Bob's wish for immortality *does* reflect *his* conception of eudaimonia (even though all he really seeks as part of his eudaimonia is a long life). At the very least, advocates of reflective accounts need to tread a very thin line between 'reflecting an agent's conception of eudaimonia' being permissive enough to allow idle wishes, on the one hand, and being narrow enough to rule out the akratic agent's akratic motivations, on the other.¹⁴

(b) *Second problem: the virtuous agent*

A second problem for reflective views concerns what they say about virtuous agents. Aristotle appears to think that virtuous agents possess non-rational desires (epithumia, thumos) and rational desires (boulêseis). The difference between a virtuous and an akratic (or enkratic) agent is that in the former the two types of desire point in the same direction, motivating him to pursue the very same course of action, whereas in the latter they conflict.¹⁵ But then it appears that both the virtuous agent's boulêseis *and* his non-rational epithumiai and thumoi will be equally reflective of his conception of eudaimonia. If so, reflective views appear to make it impossible for Aristotle to distinguish the virtuous agent's desires

¹⁴ Indeed, in *Metaph.* Θ.5 Aristotle claims that we can possess boulêseis to do contrary things at the same time (1048a21–22), so the notion of 'reflecting' in play must also be permissive enough to allow that such boulêseis can simultaneously count as reflective of the agent's conception of eudaimonia.

¹⁵ Something similar can probably be said for many vicious agents, but I shall just focus on the virtuous case.

by their objects. Each of the virtuous agent's desires are reflective of his conception of eudaimonia, and yet 'being reflective of his conception of the eudaimonia' was meant to specify the connection between *boulêsis* and the good in a way that demarcated the *boulêton* from the objects of Aristotle's other two desires.¹⁶

How might an advocate of a reflective view attempt to reply to this? One response is to insist that Aristotle's virtuous agent possesses not two motivational states, but just one.¹⁷ If the virtuous agent possesses two motivations, rational and non-rational, this might make his actions appear unnecessarily over-determined. So perhaps the different kinds of desire that Aristotle recognises are only manifest in *akratic* (and *enkratic*) agents (see e.g. *NE* 5.9.1136b6–9, *NE* 9.4.1166b6–10) because these agents are conflicted. Their presence *there* does not mean that we should expect them to be visible in virtuous agents. If this were right, then so long as the virtuous agent's single motivation was not identifiable as an *epithumia* or *thumos*, the virtuous agent would not provide a counter-example to the claim that *boulêsis* is distinguished from Aristotle's other desires in so far as it alone reflects the agent's conception of eudaimonia.

The chief difficulty with this response is that a number of texts support the notion that Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent possesses distinct (rational and) non-rational motivations. In *NE* 1.13 Aristotle considers how a non-rational part of the soul can be said to share in reason 'in a way' (*pêi*: 1102b14). He notes that although we praise the reason of *enkratic* and *akratic* agents, and the part of their soul possessing reason, since it 'urges them aright and towards the best objects', there is found in them (i.e. in their souls: 1102b20–21), another element, which fights against

¹⁶ Once again, this objection applies regardless of whether we have view (2) or (3) in mind: both the virtuous agent's *boulêseis* and his non-rational desires would be equally reflective of his conception of eudaimonia whether that conception is explicitly grasped or only embodied.

¹⁷ I suspect McDowell holds this view; see 1998: 38–40. (Thus it is no surprise that he wishes to downplay the importance of *NE* 1.13 (1998: 40n.30). But, as we shall see, that text does not stand alone.) Non-rational motivations, on the picture I am proposing, are not 'motivational propensities that are independent of conceptual thought, like a trained animal's behavioural dispositions' (McDowell (1998: 39)). See Chapter 7 below and esp. Pearson (2011a).

reason (hence they have conflicting impulses (*hormai*: 1102b21)). Aristotle adds:

Now even this [non-rational part] seems to have a share in reason, as we said; at any rate in the enkratic man it obeys reason – and presumably in the temperate and courageous man it is still more ready to listen; for in him it speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as reason. (1102b25–28)

The evidence that the non-rational part has *a share in* reason is that in the enkratic man it obeys reason, whereas in the virtuous agent it is still more ready to listen because it actually directs him in the very same direction as his rational side. Although the non-rational part in the virtuous agent speaks with the same voice as – sounds together with (*homophônein*) – reason, Aristotle never gives us cause to doubt that it exists as a distinct motive.¹⁸

The fact that it does so exist is confirmed as we proceed through the *NE*. A clear case can be found in Aristotle's account of temperance, in passages we have already considered in [Chapter 4](#) (§3). He writes:

the epithumêtikon in a temperate man should harmonise (*sumphônein*) with reason; for the noble is the aim for both, and the temperate man has epithumiai (*epithumêin*) for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (3.12.1119b15–18)

We again have the notion of a non-rational part 'harmonising' with reason in the virtuous agent. The very notion of harmonising or chiming with (*sumphônein*) suggests that we have two distinct elements, harmony requiring distinct notes that concord.¹⁹ But the most crucial point for us is that Aristotle here explicitly states that the temperate agent possesses distinct non-rational epithumiai for the acts he performs qua temperate agent. Epithumia thus exists as a distinct motivational source in this agent.

A similar picture occurs with the role of thumos in courage. In [Chapter 5](#) (§2(b) and §3) we found that the thumos of the courageous agent 'aids' him to act bravely (*NE* 3.8.1116b31), that is, it helps him to stand firm and so prompts him to act nobly. Again,

¹⁸ I provide a more detailed discussion of this passage, in particular concerning what Aristotle means by 'sharing in' reason, in Pearson (2011b: §4).

¹⁹ Aristotle could mean something more objective by 'reason' here, that is, 'right reason' (*orthos logos*), or what is rationally appropriate, but this is evidently compatible with there being a distinct rational motivation of the agent.

the virtuous agent's non-rational motivations seem to exist as a distinct motivational source.

If this is right, the response to the objection fails: the non-rational desires of virtuous agents do not disappear but remain isolable motivational states. Thus the non-rational desires of virtuous agents are no less capable of being reflective of the agent's conception of eudaimonia than his *boulêseis*, and hence 'being reflective of the agent's conception of eudaimonia' cannot be what Aristotle had in mind in linking *boulêsis* to the good (since 'reflecting the agent's conception of eudaimonia' was intended to demarcate the object of this desire from Aristotle's other desires). In short, reflective accounts make it impossible for Aristotle to distinguish the virtuous agent's rational and non-rational desires by their objects in the manner required.²⁰

(c) *Third problem: inverse akratics and enkratics*

My third and final objection to reflective views pertains to another kind of agent that Aristotle considers. In *NE* 7.2, in his list of puzzles about *akrasia*, Aristotle mentions the following general worry:

If *enkrateia* makes a man ready to stand by any and every opinion, it is bad, i.e. if it makes him stand even by a false opinion; and if *akrasia* makes a man apt to abandon any and every opinion, there will be good *akrasia*, of which Sophocles' Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* will be an instance; for he is to be praised for not standing by what Odysseus persuaded him to do, because he is pained at telling a lie. (1146a16–21)

The puzzle stems from the fact that *enkrateia* is thought to be a good state (but not as good as virtue) while *akrasia* is thought to be a bad state (but not as bad as vice). But if *enkrateia* makes one stand by every opinion, then in cases in which the opinion is false, it will make one do something bad; and if *akrasia* makes one give in to every pleasure, then when the pleasure is a noble one, it will

²⁰ Once we see that *boulêsis*, *epithumia* and *thumos* are distinguished by reference to their evaluative objects, we can understand how an agent might have two such desires at the same time in just the way Aristotle suggests in *NE* 1.13; i.e. not only when such motivations conflict (as with *akratic* and *enkratic* agents), but also when they 'harmonise' (as with virtuous agents).

make one do something good. The latter is illustrated by the case of Neoptolemus. In Sophocles' play, Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, has been sent to help Odysseus in his mission to get Philoctetes, and in particular his famous bow, to Troy to help destroy Paris and sack the city. Odysseus entreats Neoptolemus to lie to Philoctetes in order to trick the latter to come with them, or failing that at least to get the bow – and eventually he manages to get Neoptolemus to resolve to do as he demands. Neoptolemus executes the plan and succeeds in getting the bow from Philoctetes. However, he is then overcome with shame at what he has done – his inherent nobility makes him feel disgust at his deceit – and, in direct confrontation with Odysseus, he returns the bow to Philoctetes. Aristotle later states:

yet it was for the sake of pleasure that he did not stand fast – but a noble pleasure; for telling the truth was noble to him, but he had been persuaded by Odysseus to tell the lie. (*NE* 7.9.1151b19–21)

Interestingly, it is this noble pleasure that truly reflects Neoptolemus' character: he has been brought up to believe that nothing is worse than deceit.

Aristotle provides his response to this worry in *NE* 7.9. His answer is to say that *enkrateia* and *akrasia* apply in the strictest sense (*kath' hautō*) only to cases in which the agent has formed the right choice – the *enkratic* abiding by it, the *akratic* abandoning it – and only in a qualified way (*kata sumbebêkos*) to the other cases mentioned (1151a29–1151b4). If one acts against a bad choice on behalf of a noble pleasure, as Neoptolemus did, one will not count as properly *akratic*:

There are some who fail to abide by their resolutions (*doxai*), not as a result of *akrasia*, e.g. Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* ... For not everyone who does anything for the sake of pleasure is either self-indulgent or bad or *akratic*, but he who does it for a disgraceful pleasure. (1151b17–19, 21–22)

This gives Aristotle coherent specifications of *enkrateia* and *akrasia*, since the deviant cases only count as *enkrateia* and *akrasia* in a qualified sense. Let me refer to the deviant cases as 'inverse *enkrateia*' and 'inverse *akrasia*'. Aristotle appears to accept that an inverse *enkratic* will abide by a false choice and false reasoning (resisting, say, a noble pleasure), and the inverse *akratic* would give in to his noble pleasure and fail to abide by his resolutions

and false choice.²¹ In this way, inverse enkrateia, but not enkrateia per se, will indeed result in something bad, and inverse akrasia, but not akrasia per se, will result in something good.

The significance of these cases for us is that they suggest that Aristotle allows that an agent can possess a rational motivation (in line with his resolutions and choice) that *betrays* his character, while at the very same time possessing non-rational motivations that happen to reflect it. In our current terminology, a pleasure-based *epithumia* would then reflect the agent's conception of *eudaimonia* at the precise point when the *boulêsis* contained in his rational motivation fails to do so.²² If this is the correct characterisation of what is going on, the cases provide the ultimate counter-example to accounts that claim that *boulêsis* is connected to the good because it reflects the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*. If we examined Neoptolemus and had to pick out the desire that was reflective of his conception of *eudaimonia*, we would pick out his noble pleasure-based *epithumia*, not his rational desire formed in accordance with Odysseus's persuasion. Just as an agent's *boulêsis* may reflect his conception of *eudaimonia* when his *epithumiai* do not – as in *akrasia* and *enkrateia* – so too, it seems, Aristotle allows that an agent's *epithumiai* may reflect his conception of the *eudaimonia* when his *boulêsis* do not – as in inverse *akrasia* and inverse *enkrateia*.²³

3. The referential view that ties *boulêsis* to an agent's explicit conception of *eudaimonia*

Any one of the problems I have highlighted with reflective accounts would be concern enough. Together, they suggest that such views should be rejected. So let us turn instead to the

²¹ The examples might seem problematic simply in so far as they break the connection between choice and the agent's character, which Aristotle affirms elsewhere (see e.g. *NE* 3.2.1111b5–6, 1112a2, 6.2.1139a33–34). I address this issue in §4 below.

²² The formulation '*boulêsis* contained in his rational motivation' points to the fact that although choices involve *boulêsis*, they might not straightforwardly be identified as *boulêsis*. I discuss this point in the next chapter.

²³ As mentioned in n.13 above, what makes the akratic agent's non-rational desires fail to reflect his conception of *eudaimonia* (and character) is that he recognises, at least over time, that acting on them is mistaken and hence he regrets doing so (see *NE* 7.8). But this holds also with the resolutions and choices of the inverse *enkratic* and the inverse *akratic*, which flow from his rational *boulêsis*.

referential eudaimonia account, view (1). On this view, in connecting boulësis to the good, Aristotle means to indicate that whenever one has a boulësis for something, this involves desiring that thing as conducive to or part of one's explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia. It is natural to object to this view on philosophical grounds. As soon as a conception of eudaimonia becomes even moderately complicated, it becomes implausible to envisage that each boulësis involves desiring something qua an explicit grasp of that conception. Suppose an agent's conception of eudaimonia gives certain weight to pursuing his or her career, certain weight to familial life, and certain weight to recreation. And suppose the agent's conception contains further details about each of these values. The more the conception of eudaimonia is spelt out, the more absurd it becomes to think that each boulësis the agent possesses must involve desiring something as conducive to or part of an explicit cognition of that conception.²⁴

More generally, whether or not Aristotle links boulësis to the agent's conception of eudaimonia in the way view (1) proposes of course depends on whether or not he thinks agents possess an explicit conception of eudaimonia.²⁵ If he thinks that agents can have boulëseis and yet not possess such an explicit conception, he could not hold that boulësis is tied to the agent's conception of eudaimonia as this view asserts. It is worth emphasising what view (1) requires. There has been a debate in the secondary literature concerning whether Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent must have an explicit conception of his overall good or eudaimonia, a 'grand-end' or 'blueprint' that he then employs in all his ethical deliberations.²⁶ But the view that we are considering, which links boulësis to the agent's explicit conception of eudaimonia,

²⁴ In line with this, Aristotle distinguishes boulësis from choice on the ground that the former can be 'sudden' (*EE* 2.10.1226b3–4; cf. *EE* 2.8.1224a3–4, *NE* 8.3.1156b31–32). One might think that it would be easy for a sudden desire to fail to involve desiring its end qua (part of) the agent's explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia.

²⁵ The points in this paragraph also hold of view (2) since that view also claims that the agent has an explicit grasp of his conception of eudaimonia.

²⁶ See e.g. Cooper (1986: 59, see also 96–98), Broadie (1991: Ch. 4), Kraut (1993), McDowell (1996a), Bostock (2000: 82–96), and Price (2011: Ch. 4.B). Broadie argues that virtuous agents do not possess such 'an explicit, comprehensive, substantial vision of that good, a vision invested with content different from what would be aimed at by morally inferior natures' (1991: 198). Bostock (2000: 84) replies by agreeing that it

is committed to the claim that *any agent that possesses boulêseis* must have an explicit conception of their overall good. And yet, as *NE* 3.4 makes clear (see [Chapter 3](#), §3(b)), the boulêton is what appears good to the agent regardless of whether that agent is virtuous or vicious (it is just that with the virtuous agent what appears good will actually be good). Thus view (1) is committed to the idea that Aristotle thinks not only that virtuous agents possess an explicit grasp of their grand-end, but also that vicious agents (or at least each such agent who possesses boulêseis) must have an explicit conception of their eudaimonia as well. View (1), that is, appears to hold a blueprint view for both virtuous and vicious agents.²⁷ This means that advocates of this view cannot avail themselves of one option that is available to commentators who restrict the blueprint account to virtuous agents. The latter could claim that one way in which vicious agents can go wrong is precisely by their failing to work out a specific conception of their eudaimonia. Advocates of the referential view, by contrast, must claim that if such an agent possesses boulêseis, he must have an explicit conception of his eudaimonia (since this desire refers to that explicit conception). This clearly makes these positions even more demanding than a blueprint view that only applies to virtuous agents.²⁸

would be philosophically absurd to think that the virtuous agent would actually possess an explicit conception of his overall good, but (following Kraut (1993)) suggesting that there is nevertheless evidence that Aristotle thought this (appealing especially to *EE* 1.2. 1214b6–11; see next note). McDowell (1996a) argues that Aristotle's view that there are not universals in ethics (appealing to e.g. *NE* 1.3.1094b11–27, 2.9.1109b12–23) shows that he could not have thought that agents possess such a blueprint. Price (2011: Ch. 3 B.III) goes through the passages and argues that they should not, or at least need not, be read as promoting the grand-end conception.

²⁷ A key passage cited by grand-end advocates (see e.g. Kraut (1993: 304–6), Bostock (2000: 84)) is in *EE* 1.2: 'we must enjoin everyone that has the power to live according to his own choice to set up for himself some object for the good life to aim at (whether honour or reputation or wealth or culture), with reference to which he will then do all his acts, since not to have one's life organised in view of some end is a mark of much folly (*aphrosunê*)' (1214b6–11). If one reads this as (a) supporting a blueprint account of virtue (and Price (2011: Ch. 3 B.III) argues in some detail against this proposal), and yet (b) allowing that it is *possible* to fail to set oneself a blueprint (as would seem implied by the exhortation), then it would seem that some foolish vicious agents might fail to possess a conception of their eudaimonia. But then view (1) would either be false, or forced to maintain that these agents do not possess boulêseis.

²⁸ The fact that on this view every boulêsis the vicious agent possesses must also involve desiring that thing qua conducive to his explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia

Besides these considerations, we shall also want to consider whether Aristotle's examples of *boulêseis* would naturally be construed as involving desiring their objects qua conducive to or part of the agent's explicitly grasped conception of *eudaimonia*. In this respect, however, the referential view can exploit the fact that it is not always clear how such examples should be understood. Consider, for instance, the *boulêseis* that we suggested look like good examples of the kind of wants Anscombe calls 'hopes' (see Chapter 1, §5). Aristotle claims that we can have *boulêseis* for things that can in no way be brought about by our own efforts, such as that a particular athlete or actor should win a competition (*NE* 3.2.1111b23–24, cf. *EE* 2.10.1225b35–36). These appear to be cases in which we long for some future state of affairs, of which there is at least some prospect, but which we cannot ourselves do anything about (hence 'hope' seems appropriate). Now, the mere fact that the examples, as Aristotle specifies them, do not make direct reference to the agent's explicitly grasped conception of *eudaimonia* does not refute view (1). The examples do not explicitly specify *any* desirability feature, and so it is unclear precisely how Aristotle envisaged that the agent in question would view the athlete or actor winning the competition as desirable. It is thereby open for an advocate of view (1) to propose readings that fit his view, if such a reading is available and can provide a sensible interpretation. With respect to desiring an athlete to win a race, we should recall that men from all over Greece would come to compete in one of the four main games (Olympian, Pythian, Nemean and Isthmian) for athletics and, it seems, if they won, the victory would naturally reflect well on the city or town from which they came. In the victory odes of poets, we very frequently meet the notion that cities or towns rejoice in the victory of their local athlete (see e.g. many of Pindar's odes). This being so, it would be natural for people from that town to desire their athlete to win

might be thought to generate a further philosophical implausibility. Mele writes: '[this view] has the preposterous result that the *akolastos* or self-indulgent agent, whenever he intentionally goes for the nearest pleasure, has his *eupraxia* or happiness explicitly in mind. Surely, self-indulgent persons often act quite impulsively, without consciously attending to such a grand scale thing as their ultimate aim in life' (1984: 144). In order for this to be relevant, however, it will have to be the case that in such instances these agents will count as acting on *boulêseis*.

the contest in question for the honour and prestige that would be bestowed on them and their town. And clearly family members or friends of the athlete would have an added reason to desire the athlete to win, with honour and pride again likely objects of desire. The second example, an actor or reciter (*hupokritês*) winning a contest, could perhaps be understood in a similar way. At some Panathenaic festivals, it seems, various reciting or acting contests would be held (see, e.g., Plato, *Ion*, 530a–b), and so again competitors might, if they won, bestow honours on the town or city they came from and were considered to represent. And pride or honour would also be a natural object of the desire for family members or friends of the competitor in this case as well. But given these construals of the examples, it might not seem too far-fetched to think that Aristotle could have envisaged these *boulêseis* as involving agents desiring those events as conducive to or part of their conception of *eudaimonia*.²⁹

Other examples, however, are more difficult for referential views to deal with. In distinguishing *boulêsis* from choice, Aristotle writes:

we have a *boulêsis* (*boulesthai*) to be healthy, but choose the acts that will make us healthy, and we have a *boulêsis* (*boulesthai*) for *eudaimonia* (*eudaimonein*), and say we do, but cannot very well say that we choose to be so ... (*NE* 3.2.1111b27–29)

On view (1), when Aristotle mentions a *boulêsis* for *eudaimonia*, he would presumably be referring to an agent's desire for his explicitly grasped conception of *eudaimonia*. If not, then given that view (1) holds that *all* *boulêseis* involve desiring their object as conducive to or part of an agent's explicitly grasped conception of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle would instead have to mean that the agent desires *eudaimonia* as conducive to or part of his *explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia*, which sounds very odd indeed. Suppose, then, that we assume that Aristotle is referring to a *boulêsis* an agent might have for his explicit conception of his overall good. It now seems awkward for view (1) that he juxtaposes this with a *boulêsis* for health. This is because the passage reads as though it is supplying examples of ends that are equally

²⁹ Especially when one bears in mind *NE* 1.7 on how your own *eudaimonia* includes that of your family and fellow citizens (1097b8–11).

capable of grounding boulêseis. The desires appear to be on a par. And this impression seems to be confirmed by a parallel passage we find *EE* 2.10:

no one chooses to be in health, but to walk or to sit for the purpose of keeping well; no one chooses to be happy but to make money or run risks for the purpose of being happy. (1226a8–11; cf. *EE* 2.10.1226a13–17)

We can have a boulêsis to be healthy, but only choose the acts that will make us healthy, e.g. to go walking, just as we can have a boulêsis for eudaimonia, but only choose the acts that we think will bring this about, e.g. making money. View (1), however, has to construe the examples as structurally different from each other: ‘we have a boulêsis to be healthy (as conducive to our explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia), but choose the acts that make us healthy (in so far as we take these to be conducive to our explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia), and we have a boulêsis for (our explicitly grasped conception of) eudaimonia, but can’t say we choose to be so’. But this seems forced to say the very least, and to jar with the *EE* parallel passage.³⁰

Next consider Aristotle’s assertion that an agent’s choices are connected to his ethical character (e.g. *NE* 3.2.1111b5–6, 1112a2, 6.2.1139a33–34). Advocates of view (1) account for this connection by appealing to the idea that choices are for the sake of boulêseis, and that boulêseis make reference to the agent’s explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia. If choices are tied to the agent’s conception of eudaimonia in this way, they will then naturally reveal his moral character.³¹ But then the boulêseis that can be characterised as ‘idle wishes’, namely, those for immortality or to rule all mankind (*NE* 3.2.1111b22–23, *EE* 2.10.1225b32–34), seem problematic. We noted (in §2(a)) that it seems to be built into Aristotle’s description of these desires that the agent recognises

³⁰ It is worth noting that the fact that Aristotle refers to a desire for eudaimonia here does not actually lend support to the notion that he thinks that (at least some) agents have an explicit conception of their eudaimonia. Without the presumption that boulêseis refer directly to agents’ explicit conceptions of eudaimonia, we might naturally read the passage as referring to something vaguer than an explicitly grasped conception. Agents might wish to be happy without having a clear conception of what would make them so. Indeed, one might well think that an agent could think that he wants to be happy, and that this is extremely important for him, but still not have a clear grasp of what would make him so.

³¹ See Anscombe (1965); cf. also Irwin (1980b: 256–7), and Reeve (1992: 88).

that the object of such a *boulêsis* is impossible to bring about: they are for things that he accepts it would be impossible for him to choose or choose acts with a view to (*NE* 3.2.1111b20–22). But then in so far as the agent's explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia aligns with what he thinks he is able to choose, the objects of such *boulêseis* would fall outside his explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia.

In fact, though, it is not clear how firm the bond between choice and ethical character is. Inverse *enkrateia* and inverse *akrasia* (see §2(c) above) seem to break this link: with these states it is the agent's non-rational motivations that align with his ethical character, not his choices or resolutions. But if choices are for the sake of *boulêseis*, and an agent's ethical character is revealed when a choice is for the sake of a *boulêsis* that is itself for the sake of the agent's conception of eudaimonia, then because the choices of inverse *enkratics* and inverse *akratics* do not reveal the agent's ethical character, such choices would presumably not be at the service of *boulêseis* that are for the sake of the agent's explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia.³² But given that choices *are* for the sake of objects of *boulêseis*, it then seems that it must be possible for an agent's *boulêseis* to be for lower-level ends.³³

³² Instead they could be at the service of *boulêsis* for some lower-level good (for more discussion, see §4 below).

³³ On the notion that choices are for the sake of objects of *boulêseis*, see esp. *NE* 3.5.1113b3–4, cf. *NE* 3.2.1111b27–29 (and e.g. Anscombe (1965: 143–7), Mele (1984: e.g. 151, 154), Irwin (1988: 337), Hardie (1968:168–9)). *EE* 2.10 strongly supports the idea as well (see esp. 1226b4–5 '[choice] must arise out of both [boulêsis and belief], for both are found in a man choosing'; and 1226a7–15). This notion also provides the best explanation of why Aristotle claims that choice is 'near' to *boulêsis* in *NE* 3.2 (1111b19–20). For more discussion, see Chapter 7, §4, below. Some try to use a variant manuscript reading – *boulêsin* rather than *bouleusin* in *NE* 3.3.1113a12 – to support the view that *boulêsis* sets the end for a choice (Reeve (1992: 87–9), Irwin (1988: 598n.22), Meyer (1993: 34n.17), cf. Grant (1866: 22), Gauthier and Jolif (1970: 205–6)). But since *boulêsin* is attested in only one manuscript (M) whereas *bouleusin* is in all the rest (and K, L and Γ are perhaps the best manuscripts in general (see Bywater's (1894) preface in the OCT)) one could not rely on this point. Bostock (2000: 80–1) instead holds that the desire starting a choice can be either an *epithumia*, a *thumos*, or a *boulêsis*. On his view, the textual considerations that count in favour of the *boulêsis* reading are 'some-what careless generalisations' that occur because Aristotle is sometimes concerned only with good practical thinking. But there is no reason to think that Aristotle only has good practical thinking in mind in *NE* 3.2–5 (indeed, *NE* 3.4–5 explicitly addresses issues pertaining to bad agents); nor in the *NE* 6.2 passage quoted in §4 below (1139a31–35) (Aristotle refers to 'good action and its opposite').

Thus, if an agent's choices are grounded in boulêseis, and his choices reveal his character, the existence of idle wishes shows that not all boulêseis need be for the agent's conception of eudaimonia. But when an agent's choices do not reveal his character – as in inverse enkrateia and inverse akrasia – the boulêseis which they are at the service of would not be for the agent's conception of eudaimonia either.³⁴ Either way, then, i.e. whether an agent's choices reveal his character or not, an agent's boulêseis need not be tied to his explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia.

Finally, in *Metaph.* Θ.5, Aristotle refers to the possibility of having boulêseis to do contrary things at the same time (1048a21–22). If an agent's boulêseis make explicit reference to his conception of eudaimonia, this would entail that an agent can have boulêseis to do two contrary things at the same time, both of which he takes to be conducive to or part of his explicitly grasped conception of eudaimonia. At the very least, this is something that the eudaimonia referential view owes us an account of (cf. Broadie (1991: 122n.42)).³⁵

4. My non-eudaimonia-based account of the connection between boulêsis and the good

Referential accounts linking boulêsis to the agent's conception of eudaimonia thus appear no less objectionable than reflective views. But, if we give up on eudaimonia-based accounts of Aristotle's connection between boulêsis and the good, it seems most plausible to move to a view that accounts for that connection by positing that boulêseis can be for a plurality of goods, not just one. For if boulêsis is not tied to the agent's conception of eudaimonia, what other (lower-level) good could, on its own, plausibly

³⁴ These two counter-examples cannot cancel each other out since the choices of the inverse enkratics and the inverse akratics cannot be idle wishes: as we have seen, idle wishes are for boulêta that the agent recognises he cannot choose.

³⁵ Another case that view (1) will have to explain is how a boulêsis that involves wishing a friend good *for his own sake* (see e.g. *NE* 8.2.1155b31) would make explicit reference to the eudaimonia of the agent having the wish. The more the desire seems to be for the sake of the eudaimonia of the person having the wish, the less it may seem to be for the friend's *own* sake.

ground *every single* boulêsis an agent is capable of possessing? If eudaimonia fails to do this, it is hard to see how some other (lower-level) good, such as health or honour, would, on its own, have a better chance of doing so (reconsider the examples we have considered).³⁶ Suppose, then, we move to the view that a plurality of goods can ground a boulêsis.³⁷ At this juncture, we once again face the question of whether we should adopt a referential or a reflective account. Boulêsis might be connected to a plurality of goods either because they make direct reference to or because they reflect one of the goods in question.

Consider reflective accounts first. A reflective view that allowed an agent's boulêsis to reflect other goods besides his embodied conception of eudaimonia might be able to offer replies to some of the objections I raised against the eudaimonia-based version of that account. For example, the rational motivation of the inverse enkratic/akratic could be said to reflect his embodied conception of some lower-level good, e.g. respecting one's elders, obeying orders, or some such, while his non-rational motivation would reflect his embodied conception of pleasure. Then Aristotle would be in a position to distinguish this agent's boulêsis from his epithumiai by the different objects of these desires. However, one of the objections we raised against the eudaimonia-based reflective view would seem to count decisively against any reflective view we care to offer: the appeal to the virtuous agent. We saw that since Aristotle claims that the virtuous agent's boulêsis harmonise with his non-rational motivations, both his boulêsis and his epithumiai or thumoi are equally reflective of his conception of eudaimonia, and yet being reflective of the agent's conception of eudaimonia was meant to explain why boulêsis was connected to the good in contrast to, say, the pleasant (the object of epithumia). But in fact this point is equally applicable to *any* object of desire, or set of such objects, that we choose to designate. Suppose we said that an agent's boulêsis are connected

³⁶ Furthermore, in so far as each choice is for the sake of an end set by a boulêsis, this would mean that each choice would have to be for the sake of the privileged good. But the notion that Aristotle thinks that each and every choice is for the sake of some single lower-level good seems no less improbable.

³⁷ Cf. Charles (1984: 151–5), Broadie (1991: 232–8).

to the good because they are reflective of the agent's embodied conceptions of power, honour and health (perhaps: power in some circumstances, honour in others, and health in others still). Whatever set of goods we select, since the virtuous agent's non-rational motives harmonise with his rational motives, it will be the case that his non-rational motivations will be just as reflective of his embodied conceptions of these goods. This simply follows from the fact that (and in as much as) the agent's non-rational and rational motivations harmonise.³⁸ Desires that point in the same direction will be equally reflective of whatever criterion we come up with. Thus, in order to distinguish desires that point in the same direction by their objects, we must, it seems, adopt a referential account.

At this point, it is worth noting that the passages in which Aristotle links *boulêsis* to the good more naturally lend themselves to a referential reading. Pure reflective views will insist that so long as the *boulêton* appears desirable to the agent it does not matter whether it appears *as* good, in the specific sense of 'good' which pertains to *boulêsis*, for the connection of *boulêsis* to the good is to be explained in a reflective, not a referential, way. It is true that Aristotle's claim that *boulêsis* is a desire for the good (*orexis agathou*) (*Rh.* 1.10.1369a3–4, *Top* 6.8.146b5–6, cf. *EE* 7.2.1235b23) could plausibly be thought consistent with either reflective or referential views. However, when he makes this claim in the *Rhetoric*, he explains the idea that *boulêsis* is *orexis* for the good by stating: 'for no one has a *boulêsis* (*boulesthai*) for something, except when he thinks it is good' (1.10.1369a3–4), and this claim (or the related: 'no one has a *boulêsis* for that which he thinks is bad') is repeated a number of times elsewhere.³⁹ If the explanation of the fact that *boulêsis* is for the good is that we

³⁸ Likewise, and for the same reason, the agent's *boulêseis* will be just as reflective of the virtuous agent's embodied conception of pleasure as his *epithumiai* are. Reflectiveness is thus an inadequate criterion to distinguish Aristotle's species of desire by their objects, regardless of which desire is reflecting what.

³⁹ See e.g. *NE* 5.9.1136b7–8 (*spoudaion* replacing *agathon*), *NE* 9.4.1166b6–10, *EE* 2.7.1223b6–7, 32–33, and *EE* 2.10.1227a28–31 (where the idea that one can, contrary to nature, have a *boulêsis* for what is bad, is evidently meant to refer to bad things appearing good; see the remainder of the chapter and *NE* 3.4).

cannot have a *boulêsis* without thinking the object desired to be good, this suggests a referential rather than a reflective view.⁴⁰

The suggestion, then, is that in linking *boulêsis* to the good Aristotle means that each *boulêsis* makes direct reference to one of a number of different goods. On this view, a specification of the desire that reveals the evaluative respect in which the agent views the action or state of affairs desired need not refer to an explicit conception of *eudaimonia* but could simply refer to one of a number of lower-level goods. How would such a view deal with the examples that we considered in §3? First, Aristotle's referring to a *boulêsis* for health alongside a *boulêsis* for *eudaimonia* now seems unproblematic. For, on this account, health could serve as an end we can have a *boulêsis* for just as well as *eudaimonia* itself.⁴¹ Second, the notion of possessing contrary *boulêseis* is also unproblematic on this view. If *boulêseis* can refer to a number of different lower-level goods, then an agent might have a *boulêsis* to do something that makes reference to one such good, and another *boulêsis* at the same time to do something contrary that makes reference to another good. Just as an *akratic/enkratic* possesses conflicting good-based and pleasure-based desires, such an agent would possess two conflicting good-based desires. All that is required is that there are two different good-based evaluative dimensions to the agent's act. Plausible examples are provided *NE* 3.1's discussion of 'mixed' acts (1110a4–19). When, in a storm, an agent throws goods overboard on condition of securing the safety of himself and his crew, he most likely possesses conflicting desires, neither of which is pleasure-based.

⁴⁰ Perhaps this explains why Mele, who in general appears to want to adopt a reflective view, sometimes writes in ways that suggest he wishes to combine his reflective view with a referential view. He refers to *boulêseis* as involving 'thinking [things] to be good' in a way that is 'reflective of a conception of the good ... expressed in a general policy of action, the policy being constituted in part by one's traits of ethical character' (1984: 145). But, strictly speaking, to have a desire that is 'reflective of one's conception of the good' does not require that one 'think' the object of desire is good. A pleasure-based desire could be reflective of such a conception.

⁴¹ It seems possible that Aristotle thinks that an agent may just have desires for these things without having explicit conceptions of them. Indeed, an inchoate or vague desire to be healthy or happy may set one investigating what would best bring these things about. If so, then on this view, in contrast to views (1) and (2), the agent need not possess an explicit grasp of their conception of *eudaimonia*.

Third, inverse akratics/enkratics are now unproblematic also. The agent's choice (which in this case does not reflect his moral character) could be based on a boulêsis for a lower-level end than the agent's conception of eudaimonia. With Neoptolemus, for example, this could be a sense of duty or obligation towards Odysseus. Finally, reconsider idle wishes, boulêseis for states of affairs that the agent recognises to be impossible, e.g. to be immortal or to rule all mankind. What would someone view as desirable about such states of affairs? I suspect that such fantasies often work by taking an end that many of us desire and then imagining increasing the possession of it to a maximal level. With immortality, presumably the desirability feature would be the avoidance of death or physical destruction; with ruling all mankind, presumably the desirability feature would be power. On the view I am proposing, such ends (safety, power) would be possible ends of a boulêsis, but in idle wishes one finds oneself desiring states of affairs that reflect an impossible achievement of such goods. That is why Aristotle asserts that no one claims to choose such things unless he is 'ignorant of the impossibility' (*EE* 2.10.1225b35) or 'silly' (*NE* 3.2.1111b22).

At this point, let me briefly return to a point from [Chapter 5](#) (§3). As we saw, Cooper (1999a) wished to align Aristotle's three species of desire with the three objects of choice we find in *NE* 2.3: boulêsis with the advantageous (*to sumpheron*, which Cooper equates with the good), epithumia with pleasure, and thumos with the noble (*to kalon*). I argued that this was mistaken. The correlative objects of boulêsis (good) and epithumia (pleasant) apply in every case, but, even on Cooper's view, the noble was only the end of thumos with virtuous agents. And, in fact, although thumos can be for noble ends *de re*, there is no evidence to suggest that it is for noble ends *de dicto*. And epithumia can also be noble ends *de re* no less than thumos.⁴² But if boulêsis can be for a plurality of goods, I see no reason why 'the noble' should not count as one such good. Indeed, boulêsis seems to be the only desire that could

⁴² In effect the embodied reflective account of boulêsis ties boulêsis to a *de re* end, rather than a *de dicto* end. This is in fact one of the key problems with this account: the other desires can also aim at such an end *de re*, and so this feature will not distinguish boulêsis from epithumia or thumos.

plausibly aim at the noble *de dicto*. Thus, when Aristotle refers to agents aiming at what is noble (see e.g. *NE* 3.7.1115b11–13, *NE* 4.1.1120a23–24, *NE* 4.2.1122b6–7), in so far as he has a *de dicto* aim in mind, he is, I suggest, referring to a *boulêsis*. If so, the *NE* 2.3 passage is not intended to be aligned with Aristotle's three kinds of desire.⁴³

My suggestion, then, is that in connecting *boulêsis* to the good Aristotle means to allow that this desire can aim at a number of different ends, e.g. health, honour, the noble, power.⁴⁴ So long as the object of desire appears good in some such way, the desire will count as a *boulêsis*. But this naturally invites us to consider what feature the ends of *boulêseis* have in common that at least explains why the ends of *epithumia* and *thumos*, pleasure and retaliation, do not count as such. It is unclear precisely what Aristotle would say in response to this, but here is one suggestion. Perhaps he would hold that the ends of *boulêseis* are grouped together in so far as they are objects of serious concern, and are so in a way that marks them out as distinctively human concerns. This criterion would serve as a norm that Aristotle would employ to determine and specify which ends count as *boulêseis*, but would not itself be the end of any *boulêsis*. That is, the suggestion is not that when an agent has a *boulêsis* for health or honour, this involves desiring health or honour *as* something of serious concern. That would be to claim that each *boulêton* is desired qua being of serious concern, but being of serious concern is intended to be the criterion that determines whether something counts as an object of *boulêsis* in the first place. The end of a *boulêsis* is, rather, simply health or honour, or whatever else *fits* the criterion.⁴⁵ The 'serious concern' part of the criterion is designed to reflect the fact that Aristotle refers to

⁴³ See also especially Price (2001: 48–9).

⁴⁴ I see no reason in principle why there should not be an open list of such goods. For example, *NE* 9.6 (1167b6–9) appears to refer to what is just and what is advantageous as objects of *boulêsis*, which again would fit the current account. Interestingly, *Rh.* 1.10.1369b7–11, discussed in Chapter 7 below, offers a characterisation of rational desire (called *boulêsis* back at 1369a3) as aiming at a plurality of goods (*agatha*: referring back to the long list of goods in *Rh.* 1.6).

⁴⁵ Non-rational creatures might desire to do things that are in fact healthy for them, but it is plausible to think that only rational creatures can desire to do them qua health.

boulêseis as for ends, and in general seems to have substantial goals in mind.⁴⁶ The ‘distinctively human’ aspect of the criterion marks boulêsis out as a desire that is only possible for rational creatures. It thereby serves to exclude the objects of epithumia or thumos from counting as such, since the ends of those desires are ones that we share with non-rational creatures and, as we shall see in Chapter 7, this is ultimately key to Aristotle’s characterisation of them as non-rational.⁴⁷ Of course, in one sense it is not true that pleasure cannot be an object of boulêsis. As we noted in Chapter 3 (§3(b)), Aristotle thinks that we often go astray because of pleasure, and pursue it as a good when it is not (*NE* 3.4.1113a33–b2). In this way, pleasure can be an object of boulêsis: boulêsis can aim *de re* at what is pleasant. But it must always do so *as* something good, in the sense of good that specifies the boulêton, not merely the orekton in general. When agents pursue pleasure as good in this way – *as* e.g. healthy or honourable or conducive to some other end – they pursue it as though it were an object of some significant human concern, something distinctive of rational creatures. In this they might be mistaken, but the error would be natural enough for ‘we are so constituted that the pleasant appears good to the soul and the more pleasant better’ (*EE* 2.10.1227a39–40).

Let me close this chapter by rebutting an argument that has been provided in favour of linking boulêsis to eudaimonia.⁴⁸ There is an apparent inconsistency in Aristotle’s account of choice (*prohairesis*). He seems to hold the following:

- (a) choice is what is determined by deliberation (*NE* 3.3.1113a2–5);

⁴⁶ For the link of boulêsis to ends, see *NE* 3.4.1113a15, 3.5.1113b3; but cf. *NE* 3.2.1111b26 (*mallon tou telous*), *EE* 2.10.1226a13–14 (*boulêtai de ge malista to telos*), and also Chapter 7, §4, below. The notion that boulêseis are for substantial goals can fit idle wishes too, if I was right to think that they can be construed as cases in which the agent maximises some value to an impracticable level.

⁴⁷ It is important to note that the suggestion is that it is the basic value of the desire (pleasure, retaliation) that is being considered to be shared with non-rational creatures, not some more specific characterisation of the pleasure, which may well be specific to humans – see Chapter 7.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Anscombe (1965), Mele (1984: 142–3), Irwin (1988: 598, n.22); cf. McDowell (1980: 361) (the latter focusing on choice, not boulêsis).

- (b) what the akratic agent does qua akratic, he does not choose to do; indeed he acts against his choice (e.g. *NE* 3.2.1111b13–14, *NE* 7.8.1151a5–7).⁴⁹

However, in *NE* 6.9 Aristotle also mentions the possibility of a calculating akratic agent, who as a result of his calculation reaches what he set himself to do, and so deliberates correctly, but gets for himself something bad (1142b18–20).⁵⁰ This suggests:

- (c) an akratic agent, even when acting against his choice, does on occasion determine what to do by deliberation.

(a), (b) and (c) form an inconsistent triad: if choice is what is determined by deliberation, then the deliberating akratic acts on a choice, but Aristotle denies that the akratic acts on a choice. The most widely accepted solution to this problem is that (a) needs to be revised: choice is not simply determination by calculation or deliberation, but determination by deliberation in a way that reveals one's moral character (see e.g. *NE* 3.2.1111b5–6, 1112a2, 6.2.1139a33–34). Why do commentators think that choices reveal one's character? Choices seem to involve deliberation concerning how to obtain the object of one's *boulêseis* (see n.33 above). And so if *boulêseis* are tied to the agent's conception of his overall good or *eudaimonia*, deliberations based on such desires might well reveal one's character. This would also explain why the akratic agent's deliberations with a view to his akratic end cannot become choices: they are at the service of *epithumiai*, not of *boulêseis*, and *epithumiai* are tied to pleasure, not the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*. Thus, the argument goes, in connecting *boulêsis* to the good Aristotle must mean that this desire is tied to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*.

It is both true that Aristotle does sometimes link choice to character, and also true that he does appear to think that *boulêseis* underlie choices. But to move from this to the idea that *boulêseis* must be tied to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*, and

⁴⁹ His action is voluntary (*NE* 3.1.1111a24–1111b3), but not chosen.

⁵⁰ Anscombe provides the example of a 'weak, calculating, uncontrolled man, who disapproves of adultery but is tempted about his neighbour's wife: he gives way to the temptation and sets out to seduce her; then he calculates how best to do this and shows plenty of cleverness in his calculations' (1965: 146).

hence that this is what Aristotle means in connecting boulêsis to the good, is unwarranted. First, we have no reason to think that choices must *in every instance* reflect the agent's moral character. To be sure, Aristotle *does* link an agent's choices to his ethical character. In *NE* 6.2, he writes:

The origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end. This is why choice cannot exist either without thought and intellect or without a moral state (*êthikê hexis*); for good action (*eupraxia*) and its opposite cannot exist without a combination of intellect and character. (1139a31–35)

But the idea that choice *cannot exist* without a moral state does not entail that *each* choice is directly reflective of that moral state.⁵¹ The notion that choices can only arise in creatures that have moral characters, is consistent with the idea that certain choices (as with inverse akratics/enkratics) may for some reason not reflect that character. Again, in *NE* 3.2, Aristotle writes: '[choice] is thought to be most closely bound up with virtue and discriminate characters better than actions do' (*NE* 3.2.1111b5–6) and 'by choosing what is good or bad we are men of a certain character' (*NE* 3.2.1112a2). These remarks may suggest that there is a general connection between choice and character, but they do not entail that that connection holds of each and every choice nor rule out the possibility that one may on occasion choose something that does not reflect one's character.⁵² And, in fact, we have seen that there are counter-examples to the claim that an agent's choices must reflect his moral character: in inverse akrasia/enkrateia the agent's choice runs against his moral character (it is instead his pleasure-based desire that reflects his character), and so the boulêseis that underlie such choices will not reveal the agent's moral character.

In addition, the fact that boulêseis underlie choices does not show that every boulêsis is tied to choices in this way. The boulêseis we have characterised as idle wishes are not bound to choices, on Aristotle's view (the agent recognises that the end is impossible

⁵¹ Contra e.g. Cooper (1986: 47–8, n.59), Kenny (1979: 98); cf. also Reeve (1992: 87–91).

⁵² For an explanation of how the general link might hold without applying to every case, see especially Charles (1984: 154–5).

and so cannot choose things that are conducive to it).⁵³ Hence the argument gives us no reason to think that all *boulêseis* are tied to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*, and so no reason to think that this is what Aristotle intends in linking *boulêsis* to the good (i.e. assuming that the connection between *boulêsis* and the good applies in every case, these being correlative terms). Furthermore, even when *boulêseis* do underlie choices, and those choices do reflect the agent's character, we cannot conclude that such *boulêseis* are for the agent's explicit conception of *eudaimonia*. They could simply be for lower-level ends.⁵⁴

In general, the argument's claim that in order to distinguish the akratic agent's deliberations from deliberations that lead to a choice it must be the case that all *boulêseis* are tied to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia* is fallacious. Akratic deliberations are at the service of an *epithumia*, whereas deliberations leading to a choice are at the service of a *boulêsis*. Thus, so long as *boulêsis* and *epithumia* have different objects, Aristotle will be able to distinguish the akratic deliberations of the deliberative akratic (which are for the sake of a pleasure-based *epithumia*) from the deliberations that lead to a choice (which are for the sake of a good-based *boulêsis*). The referential view I am proposing gives *boulêsis* and *epithumia* different objects even though the former is not bound to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered what Aristotle intends in connecting *boulêsis* to the good. The notion of the good that specifies the *boulêton* is narrower than the notion of good that picks out the *orekton* in general. Aristotle distinguishes his desires by their

⁵³ Furthermore, in his discussion of deliberation Aristotle claims that sometimes when we are deliberating we might come upon an impossibility and so give up the search (*NE* 3.3.1112b24–26). The *boulêseis* that provided the initial goal for such reasoning would not be bound up with choices either.

⁵⁴ We can perhaps conclude that they reflect the agent's embodied conception of *eudaimonia* (since that is just another way of referring to his character), but this cannot account for the connection between *boulêsis* and the good since we have no reason to think that all *boulêsis* are tied to the agent's character (as points (1) and (2) show), and no reason to think that other desires cannot be equally reflective (see §2(b) above).

objects, and so the boulêton must pick out a subsection, not the whole, of the orekton. But this observation itself still leaves open the scope of the boulêton and the way in which it is connected to the good. I have argued at length that it is a mistake to think that boulêsis is connected to the good because each instance of it is tied to the agent's conception of eudaimonia. Neither (what I called) 'reflective' nor 'referential' versions of this view work. A key problem with the reflective reading is that it makes it so that Aristotle is unable adequately to distinguish his three desires by their objects – each of a virtuous agent's desires is reflective in the very same way. But in fact this proved to be a more general problem with the notion of 'reflecting' as a way of marking out a desire's object. No matter what notion of good we pick, non-rational and rational desires point in the same direction in virtuous agents. Hence, if the former is reflective of some good, the latter will also be so. The referential eudaimonia view fares no better. It not only leaves Aristotle with a philosophically implausible view, it also does not fit well with a number of his examples of boulêseis. Once we give up the idea that each boulêsis is tied to the agent's conception of eudaimonia, a referential view that permits a broader range of goods (such as health, honour, power) to count as objects of boulêsis emerges as a strong candidate for what Aristotle intends in linking boulêsis to the good; and this account can deal with the cases that proved awkward for the other views.⁵⁵ I also suggested that what groups the plurality of ends that a boulêsis can aim at is that they are objects of serious human concern, when this is understood to pick out distinctively human ends.

⁵⁵ The view has the additional benefit that it can remain neutral on the controversial question of whether or not Aristotle thinks that (virtuous) agents possess an explicit conception of their eudaimonia: an explicit grasp of eudaimonia may or may not be among the goods that count as ends of boulêseis, subject to us determining whether or not Aristotle thinks agents possess such a conception. See also n.30 and n.41 above.

CHAPTER 7

RATIONAL AND NON-RATIONAL DESIRE

At the start of [Chapter 4](#) we noted that Aristotle sub-divides orexis in two different ways: into the three species, epithumia, thumos, and boulêsis; and into rational and non-rational orexeis. Now that we have examined Aristotle's three species of orexis, it remains to consider his rational/non-rational division. In several passages Aristotle claims that boulêsis belongs to the rational part of the soul, whereas epithumia and thumos belong to the non-rational part. A particularly clear example is in *De an.* 3.9, in a passage we discussed at the beginning of [Chapter 1](#). As we saw, Aristotle insists that the orektikon is distinct 'in both definition and capacity' from all other capacities, and should not be split up (i.e. in a way that makes it disappear). For, if we adopt a tripartite division of the soul (seen in Plato's *Republic* Book 4), i.e. into a reasoning part (logistikon), a thumotic part (thumikon), and an epithumetic part (epithumêtikon), there will nevertheless 'be orexis in each part' (432b7); whereas if we instead adopt a bipartite division (which Aristotle himself employs in *NE* 1.13) into a rational part (*logon echon*) and a non-rational part (*alogon*), it will still be the case that 'in the rational part there will be boulêsis, and in the non-rational part epithumia and thumos' (432b5–6). Orexis, it seems, would fall into each part of a tripartite division, or straddle each side of a bipartite division. From our current perspective, the key point is that the passage clearly suggests that boulêsis is rational in some way that epithumia and thumos are not. And we find this idea echoed in a number of other passages.¹ Our task in the present

¹ Passages in *Rh.* 1.10–11 and *De an.* 3.10 will be considered later on. See also e.g. *Top.* 4.5.126a13: 'boulêsis is always found in the rational part (*logistikon*)'; *NE* 3.1, where Aristotle characterises epithumia and thumos as non-rational affections (*ta aloga pathê: 1111b1*), in contrast to reasoning (*logismos: 1111a34*); *NE* 3.2 and *EE* 2.10, which both

chapter is to understand the basis for this division: in what sense is *boulêsis* rational while *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational?

In fact, there are quite a number of accounts of this division that might be proposed (and quite a few that have been proposed), and I shall not be able to consider every alternative. Instead, I shall consider a few that might initially seem attractive, and in the process develop my own account.

1. Thought-based versus non-thought-based desires

One suggestion might be that *boulêsis* is rational because it involves thought (reason, belief) in its formation, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they do not. This view might be thought to fit well with the notion that non-rational animals – who only experience non-rational desires (see e.g. *NE* 3.1.1111a24–26) – lack universal beliefs and are restricted to *phantasia* and memory of particulars (*NE* 7.3.1147b4–5). In fact, the view can be understood in two different ways, reflecting the fact that there are two ways in which a desire might ‘involve thought in its formation’.

First, one might claim that *boulêsis* is rational because it is *triggered* by a thought, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they are triggered by a capacity other than thought, viz. perception or *phantasia*. For example, a thought about obesity might, in Roger, trigger a desire to go jogging on grounds of health; whilst seeing an ice-cream van or having a perceptual *phantasia* of

distinguish *boulêsis* from *epithumia* and *thumos* and then proceed to group together the latter, in contrast to the former, as shared by non-rational creatures (*ta aloga*: *NE* 3.2.1111b12–13), or brutes (*ta thêria*: *EE* 2.10.1225b27). The exception is a passage in *Pol.* 7.15, in which *boulêsis* is grouped with *epithumia* and *thumos* as being in the non-rational part of the soul, and is said to exist in children from birth (1334b21–25). The passage has no resonance elsewhere in Aristotle and is not the only point where *Pol.* provides an anomalous view on desire (see Chapter 5, §2(c)). Broadie (1991: 121–2n.40) suggests that *boulêsis* *could* be said to be implanted in children from birth in so far as they are potentially rational creatures, and thus a rational desiderative response is already potentially present in them. But if a rational response could be said to belong to the non-rational part of the soul because some non-rational creatures have the potential to develop it, reason itself should also be assigned this status since the same creatures have the potential to develop reason more generally. And yet Aristotle explicitly states that reason develops later (1334b24–25).

an ice-cream might, in Trevor, trigger a desire to eat an ice-cream. Since Roger's desire was triggered by a thought, it would count as rational (a *boulêsis*) on this version of the view, whereas since Trevor's desire was triggered by perception or perceptual *phantasia*, it would count as non-rational (in this case an *epithumia*).

Second, one might claim that *boulêsis* is rational because *envisaging its object* involves an operation of thought, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because envisaging their objects involves perceptual *phantasia*.² For example, Roger's desire to go jogging might involve thinking that it would be healthy to do so, while Trevor's desire for an ice-cream might involve the perceptual construal of the ice-cream as something that would be tasty.

However, neither of these views seems likely, and for the same basic reason: it seems probable that Aristotle would allow that *epithumia* and *thumos* could also involve thoughts in their formation in either of these ways.

With respect to the first account, consider a section of the passage from *NE* 7.6 that we discussed in [Chapter 5](#) (§3):

For reason (*logos*) or *phantasia* informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and *thumos*, reasoning as it were (*hōsper sullogisamenos*) that anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightway; while *epithumia*, if reason (*logos*) or perception merely says that an object is pleasant, springs to the enjoyment of it. (1149a32–1149b1)

Here 'reason' is contrasted with *phantasia* and perception and seems equivalent to thought or belief. But since Aristotle explicitly states that reason can trigger either *thumos* or *epithumia*, and these desires are non-rational, the capacity that triggers a desire must be irrelevant to its rational status.

With respect to the second account, although Aristotle does not explicitly proclaim on the matter, there seems little reason to think that every non-rational desire only employs *phantasia* in envisaging its object. This is because the cognitive capacity involved in grasping such content will often naturally be the same as the cognitive capacity that provided the information that led to its formation (except that perception alone, without any input from

² In this case perception is unable to provide the relevant information without the help *phantasia*, as we saw in [Chapter 2](#), §4.

phantasia, cannot itself grasp objects of desire, see Chapter 2, §4). If, as *NE* 7.6 states, reason can provide the information leading to an epithumia or thumos, it would be natural to think that grasping the specific object or content of the desire might in turn involve reason. A letter with a subtle slight might lead to a thumos for an equally subtle revenge-letter. Reason might suggest smoking an expensive Cuban cigar would be pleasurable and this lead to an epithumia to do so. Both of these specific desire-contents (to-write-a-subtle-revenge-letter; to-smoke-an-expensive-Cuban-cigar) seem beyond the capacity of non-rational animals, and so to require thought, and yet both could be natural responses to information supplied by reason.³

Clearly non-rational desires, on Aristotle's view, need not involve thought in their formation: they can be triggered by perception or perceptual phantasia and can involve envisaging the object of desire through perceptual phantasia. This explains why and how non-rational creatures that lack the capacity for thought can nonetheless possess desires, on Aristotle's account.⁴ But since it seems *possible* for non-rational desires to involve thought in their formation (either as a trigger or in envisaging the object of desire), the mere involvement of thought in a desire's formation would not make that desire a rational one, on Aristotle's view.⁵

2. Bodily versus non-bodily desires

An alternative proposal might be that non-rational desires are tied to *the body* in a way that rational desires are not.⁶ Once again, there is more than one way this view could be understood. The

³ The epithumia here is for a bodily pleasure, but we saw in Chapter 4 that Aristotle has a broader notion of epithumia which extends to desires for non-bodily pleasures as well, and with such epithumiai the end would be even more likely to be grasped by reason.

⁴ I consider the significance of this aspect of Aristotle's view in detail in my 2011a.

⁵ Do all *rational* desires involve reason in their formation? I see no reason to think that *boulêseis* could not be triggered by perception or perceptual phantasia (e.g. Roger's desire to go jogging for the sake of health could be triggered by him *seeing* someone jog past him). But with respect to envisaging an object of *boulêsis*, Aristotle perhaps does think that *boulêseis* involve thoughts. At any rate, he claims that no one has a *boulêsis* for what he does not think to be good (see e.g. *NE* 5.9.1136b7–8; further references provided in Chapter 6, §4, pp. 161–2).

⁶ Cf. Bostock (2000: 34), Hardie (1968: 219), Crisp (2000: 206).

suggestion might be that non-rational desires *aim at bodily gratification*, whereas rational desires have some other object. Alternatively, the suggestion might be that non-rational desires are tied to the body not because they aim at bodily gratification, but because they *are themselves* in some sense bodily states.

The first thing to address with the first version of this view – that non-rational desires aim at bodily gratification whereas rational desires do not – is the scope of epithumia. We saw in [Chapter 4](#) that Aristotle appears to possess two different notions of this desire, one in which it is tied to bodily pleasures (indeed certain kinds of these), and another in which it extends to non-bodily pleasures. The view under consideration, it seems, must hold that when Aristotle claims that epithumia is non-rational he only has in mind the narrow notion of this desire. This is possible, of course, but it already limits the scope of the account. The view becomes less attractive still when we consider thumos. We saw in [Chapter 5](#) that Aristotle primarily understands thumos as a desire for retaliation formed in response to a perceived slight. But in what sense could such a desire be said to aim at bodily gratification? The sense in which epithumia (on the narrow notion) aims at bodily pleasure is that it aims at pleasurable physical sensations, but although a desire for retaliation *might* in effect be a desire for something that involves physical contact (e.g. physical violence), this seems to be a contingent feature of such desires. Since slights are construed very broadly (see [Chapter 5](#), and §5 below), there is little reason to think that the corresponding desire for retaliation would always aim at physical contact, and so involve aiming at something bodily. And, in fact, even when it does, one might suspect that bodily contact is a concomitant, not a focal goal. Or, at least, if aiming at something to be achieved through bodily means (viz. violent revenge) makes a desire count as aiming at bodily gratification, then we should want to know why *boulêseis*, as rational, would never count as aiming at bodily gratification. Indeed, as we noted in the last chapter, Aristotle refers to a *boulêsis* for health (*NE* 3.2.1111b27), by which he means bodily health,⁷ and (in the *EE*

⁷ Although Aristotle recognises that people can be mad (see e.g. *NE* 7.5.1148b25–27), and so suffer from what we would call mental illness, his notion of ‘health’ (*hugieia*) is bodily (see e.g. *NE* 2.2.1104a16–17, *EE* 7.2.1235b33–38).

parallel passage) he refers to choosing to go walking as a means to achieving this (2.10.1226a8–11).

With respect to the view that non-rational desires are tied to the body not because they aim at bodily gratification, but because they are themselves in some sense bodily states, there are in turn two different ways that this account might be understood. First, Aristotle might hold that non-rational desires involve physical distress (that the agent seeks to ameliorate). This would fit the narrow notion of *epithumia* characterised in Chapter 4 (§1) since, on that notion, *epithumiai* (e.g. hunger and thirst) incorporate a painful disrupted bodily state. But once again it would not seem to fit the broader notion because, on that specification, *epithumia* can be for pleasures that do not presuppose any pain (see Chapter 4, §2, coupled with *NE* 10.3.1173b16–20, quoted in Chapter 4, §1). So this view would also have to hold that in claiming that *epithumia* is non-rational Aristotle only has in mind the narrow notion of the desire. Putting that to one side, a key problem with this account is that *thumos* does not naturally conform to it, since although Aristotle characterises *thumos* (as *orgê*) as accompanied by pain (*meta lupês*) (*Rh.* 2.2.1378a30–32), the ‘pain’ in question arises from a slight, e.g. an insult, and so would, frequently at least, be a *mental* distress, not a bodily sensation.

Second, Aristotle might instead hold not that all non-rational desires involve *felt* bodily affects, but rather that they, in contrast to rational desires, are psycho-physical states. We noted in Chapter 5 (§1) that Aristotle characterises affections (*pathê*) as ‘enmattered accounts’ (*De an.* 1.1.403a25) and illustrates with the example of *orgê*, which he suggests could be characterised either as a desire for revenge or as boiling of the blood around the heart (403a30–31). If Aristotle held that *epithumia* involves the body in an analogous way, he might have a basis for the distinction between rational and non-rational desires. However, the problem with this account is that Aristotle appears to think that *all* desires, or at least all those capable of moving us, must be psycho-physical states, not merely non-rational ones. Aristotle asserts of *orexis* in general that it is ‘among the functions common to body and soul’ (*De an.* 3.10.433b19–21), and seems to hold that all desires, or at least all those capable of moving us, are accompanied by heating

or chilling (whether we notice it or not) and that this is integral to their capacity to move us.⁸ If all (action-prompting) desires are psycho-physical, such a feature evidently could not serve as the basis for Aristotle's rational/non-rational distinction.

3. Desires that are responsive to a normative judgement versus those that are not so responsive

Another idea worth considering is that *boulêsis* is rational because it is in some way responsive to a judgement as to the appropriateness of the object desired, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they are not responsive in this way.⁹ This is to read 'rational' (*logon echein, logistikê*) normatively. On this view, a *boulêsis* will abate (or pass into something expressible purely in the optative mood: 'would that it were...' etc.) if the agent discovers that it is not appropriate to desire the object; whereas an *epithumia* or *thumos* will not be responsive in this way. Suppose that Maureen possesses a *boulêsis* to spend a day at a spa because she believes that it would be good for her health to do so; and suppose also that Maureen possesses an *epithumia* to go to the spa because she thinks that it would be pleasant to spend the day there. The idea would be that if Maureen subsequently discovers that the spa will not actually have a positive effect on her health – it is a bit of a con – and judges that this makes it inappropriate for her to go (as it would be a waste of money to do so), then since her *boulêsis* incorporates a judgement that it is appropriate to desire the thing in question, and going to the spa is now deemed inappropriate, it would at this point disappear (or at least shift into something expressible in the optative mood), whereas since her pleasure-based *epithumia* incorporates no such judgement there is nothing to prevent it from continuing unabated.

⁸ See especially *De motu an.* 8, and Charles (2011) for detailed discussion. Interestingly, Aristotle also associates practical wisdom with blood that is thin and cold (or thin and clear) in *Part. an.* 2.2 (648a7–11), in passages we considered in Chapter 5, §2(b).

⁹ This is formulated so as to include hopes and idle wishes; i.e. we do not have: *boulêsis* is rational because it is responsive to a judgement that it would be appropriate to act in some way.

A key difficulty with this view concerns specifying precisely how *boulêsis* is tied to a judgement concerning the appropriateness of the object desired in a way that manages (i) to make it so that *epithumia* and *thumos* do not come out as responsive in this way, whilst (ii) making it so that all *boulêseis* must be so responsive. If, on the one hand, the view is just a way of stating that *boulêseis* are responsive to a judgement that the object desired will in fact be valuable in the respect it is desired, then we would not get the required distinction. No doubt a *boulêsis* for something *qua* health would abate if one discovers that the thing in question will not in fact be healthy, but equally an *epithumia* for something would presumably abate if one discovered that the thing in question was not going to be *pleasant* in the respect envisaged, and a *thumos* would abate if one discovered that the intended action will not bring about the expected *retaliation* after all.¹⁰ If, on the other hand, the judgement that *boulêsis* is meant to be responsive to is independent of the object of the *boulêsis* (say, concerning the general propriety of the object), then it is hard to see why *boulêsis* *must* be responsive in the way proposed. Suppose that Maureen subsequently discovers *not* that the spa will have no positive effect on her health – so far as she knows it will – but that the spa she wants to go to is being run illegally; and suppose that she takes this to entail that it would be inappropriate for her to go. Since the object of her *boulêsis* is tied to health, not legality, there seems to be no reason to think that her *boulêsis* to go to the spa on grounds of health could not continue unabated any less than her *epithumia* to go there on grounds of pleasure. *Or*, at least, in so far as her *boulêsis* is responsive to such a judgement, there seems to be no reason to think that her *epithumia* could not also be so. Indeed, as we have noted, Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent's rational and non-rational desires harmonise with each other (see Chapter 6, §2(b)), and so presumably *both* the

¹⁰ The fact that non-rational animals cannot make such judgements has no bearing on this. Their *epithumiai* would be responsive to such judgements, if they could make them, it is just that they are unable to do so. In fact, though, even their responses would be responsive in some way; namely to their becoming aware (through perception or *phantasia*) that the object desired is not in fact e.g. pleasant: if the creature bites into something that looks pleasant, but discovers that it is actually rotten inside, it will not continue eating. See also Pearson (2011a).

virtuous agent's *boulêseis* and her non-rational *epithumiai* and *thumoi* would be responsive to a judgement that there is overriding reason not to do something.¹¹

A further difficulty for the normative view is that Aristotle mentions the possibility of *boulêseis* for contrary things at the same time (*Metaph.* Θ.5.1048a21–22). At the very least, we seem to need some explanation of how it is that two contrary *boulêseis* could both be responsive to such a judgement at the very same time.¹²

4. Desires that are consequent upon deliberation versus those that are not so consequent

In §1 we saw that the mere fact that a desire involves thoughts or reason in its formation did not make that desire rational for Aristotle. But perhaps his view is not that desires are rational simply if they involve thoughts, but that desires are rational if they involve *thinking* or *reasoning*. By this we would presumably mean neither that the reasoning in question involves one *choosing to have* the desire (which sounds strange),¹³ nor that the desire *simply arrives* after some reasoning or deliberation (as a desire for a stiff drink may arise after giving a lecture), but rather that the desire is formed *in virtue of*, or arises *as a result of*, a piece of reasoning or deliberation, such that what explains the desire is the fact that one deliberated or decided as one did.¹⁴ In similar vein, some commentators have suggested that Aristotle thinks that every *boulêsis*

¹¹ Or perhaps, with some agents, the *epithumia* might be responsive even when the *boulêsis* fails to be so; cf. inverse *akrasia* and inverse *enkrateia*, discussed in the previous chapter (§2(c)).

¹² The same problems would apply to views that claimed that a desire is rational if it is (reflectively) endorsed and non-rational if it is not (reflectively) endorsed. Cf. Frankfurt (1988).

¹³ Frede (1996: 267) appears to distinguish between rational and non-rational desires on precisely this ground. On her view, the former are 'a matter of rational choice', whereas with non-rational desires we do not 'choose to be disturbed', nor 'choose to desire the fulfilment of' our cravings. But, just as it usually sounds odd to say that we choose to believe something (we believe in response to the evidence, not what we choose), it surely sounds odd (except in unusual circumstances) to say that we choose any of our desires, rational or otherwise. Indeed, Aristotle carefully distinguishes choice (*prohairesis*) from *boulêsis* in *NE* 3.2 and *EE* 2.10 (as we have seen, and will again return to shortly).

¹⁴ See Schueler (1995: 17) (the lecture example is his). Such are Nagel's 'motivated desires' (1970: Ch. 4); see also Chapter 8 below.

is formed in virtue of deliberation.¹⁵ If so, perhaps such a feature could account for the rational status of the desire? Assessing this view will require more detailed discussion than the accounts considered hitherto. (One might naturally understand the view as maintaining that *boulêsis* is rational because it is formed in virtue of an *explicitly cognised* process of deliberation. In fact, it has been denied that the view has this implication, but since this issue is not important for my subsequent argument, I reserve discussion of it for an Appendix to this chapter.)

In *De an.* 3.10 Aristotle claims:

intellect (*nous*) does not appear to produce movement without orexis; for *boulêsis* is a form of orexis, and when one is moved in accordance with reasoning (*kata ton logismon*), one is moved in accordance with one's *boulêsis* (*kata boulêsin*) too; yet orexis produces movement even contrary to reasoning (*para ton logismon*), for epithumia is a kind of orexis. (433a22–26)

The notion that whenever one is moved in accordance with reasoning or calculation (*logismos*), one is moved in accordance with one's *boulêsis*, naturally suggests that if we find that we have been moved by reasoning, we have *eo ipso* been moved by a *boulêsis*. If this feature is meant to distinguish *boulêsis* from *epithumia* and *thumos*, it could account for the rational status of the former.

However, strictly speaking, the notion that every desire that is consequent upon reasoning is a *boulêsis* does not entail that every *boulêsis* is consequent on reasoning. It could be the case that although every desire that is consequent of reasoning is a *boulêsis*, so too many desires that are not consequent on reasoning are also *boulêseis*. In addition, one might argue that Aristotle's account here is actually intended to be consistent with the idea that *epithumia* and *thumos* can be consequent on deliberation or calculation. The passage is a direct response to certain conflicting phenomena

¹⁵ See e.g. Irwin (1980b: 257), Nussbaum (2001: 486n.32; cf. 1978: 335–6), Cooper (1999b: 242–3). Besides the passages I now go on to consider, cf. also *NE* 7.6.1149a32–1149b1, quoted above, which refers to *thumos* as involving *quasi*-reasoning ('as if having reasoned'). Presumably it is only 'as if' this desire incorporates a reasoning process in its formation because to incorporate an explicit process of reasoning would make it so that non-rational creatures would not be able to undergo *thumoi*, whereas they palpably can, on Aristotle's view. But then perhaps Aristotle would say that a desire is rational if and only if it *does* incorporate an explicit process of reasoning in its formation (in contrast to *thumos*, which only incorporates quasi-reasoning, and *epithumiai*, which fails to incorporate even that)? I discuss the *NE* 7.6 passage in greater detail in my 2011b.

that Aristotle had highlighted at the end of *De an.* 3.9. He noted (i) that thought (*nous*) alone could not account for movement, since *akrasia* involves acting against thought in accordance with an *epithumia*, and (ii) that *orexis* could not totally account for movement either, since *enkrateia* involves acting with thought against *epithumia* (433a2–3, 6–8). Aristotle now resolves this tension in favour of *orexis* being the mover. He states (i') that when one acts in accordance with one's thought/reasoning, one also acts in accordance with one's *boulêsis*, and since *boulêsis* is a type of *orexis* this means that one also acts in accordance with *orexis*. Thus *orexis* can account for movement without our giving up the phenomenon of *enkrateia*. Further, (ii') *epithumia* is a form of *orexis*, so when one acts in accordance with *epithumia* against one's thought (in *akrasia*) one is also moved by *orexis*. So *orexis* can be said to be involved in every case of movement. But given this *akrasia/enkrateia* background to the *De an.* 3.10 passage above, and given that in *akrasia* and *enkrateia* the rational motive represents what the agent thinks good (see e.g. *NE* 5.9.1136b7–8), it seems that by 'reasoning', in 433a24–25, Aristotle might specifically mean reasoning with a view to what the agent thinks good.¹⁶ If so, the passage would in fact be consistent with Aristotle allowing that *epithumia* and *thumos* could also be consequent on reasoning, so long as that reasoning was at the service of their respective ends.¹⁷

At this point, it is helpful to consider *Rhetoric* 1.10.¹⁸ Aristotle there considers various 'causes' (*aitia*) of action. He claims that some actions, i.e. those caused by chance, nature and compulsion, are not due to a man himself; while others, those caused by habit

¹⁶ And given this context, the passage might then be taken to support the notion that the desire that comes out of a choice is a *boulêsis*: with both *akrasia* and *enkrateia* the *logismos* or *nous* that lines up with the *boulêsis* is that which underlies the agent's choice (this is what the *enkratic* agent holds firm to and what the *akratic* agent acts against). *Logismos* is linked to deliberation at e.g. *NE* 6.7.1141b12–14.

¹⁷ See also n.21 and n.37 below.

¹⁸ Of course, we have to be somewhat careful with drawing theories from *Rh.* since it is perhaps primarily intended as a manual for orators, and not as science, (but cf. Striker (1996: 287) ('theory-based results') against e.g. Cooper (1993: 178–84) ('merely *endoxa*') on *Rh.*'s account of the emotions. I shall, as elsewhere in this book, see whether the discussion might illuminate passages elsewhere (here in *De an.* 3.10), rather than simply assume that it must be integrated into a final account.

(*ethos*) and orexis, are (1368b36–1369a1). He then further subdivides those actions that are due to orexis:

[Of actions that are due to orexis] some are due to rational (*dia logistikên*) orexis, others to non-rational (*di' alogon*) [orexis]. The first [i.e. rational orexis] is boulêsis, which is orexis of the good (for no one has a boulêsis (*boulêsthai*) except for what he thinks good); orgê and epithumia are non-rational desires. (1369a1–4, my translation)

So far, we might appear to have no more than the claim we found in *De an.* 3.9 (see §1) that boulêsis is rational and epithumia and thumos (here called orgê, but thumos picks this up at 1369a7) are non-rational, coupled with the notion that boulêsis requires thinking the object of desire to be good (see Chapter 6, §4). But Aristotle then provides a list of all his causes of action (1369a6–7) and in it 'boulêsis'/'rational desire' is replaced by '[actions that are] due to *logismos* (reasoning)', as seemingly an equivalent characterisation. *Logismos* (reasoning, calculation) is the same word Aristotle employed in the *De an.* 3.10 passage we have just considered (the participle indicating that reasoning is intended). And this specification is also employed a little further on, when Aristotle explains which actions are performed on this basis:

Through *logismos* [occur] things that seem to be advantageous (*ta dokounta sumpherein*) on the basis of goods that have been mentioned, either as an end or as tending to (*pros*) an end, and are performed for the sake of the advantage (*dia to sumpherein*) ... (1369b7–9, translation after Kennedy (1991: 90))

'Goods that have been mentioned' seems to refer back to the list of goods and advantageous things that Aristotle provided earlier (in *Rh.* 1.6).¹⁹ Two points are significant from this passage. (i) The fact that *logismos* (reasoning), here, is tied to a specific sort of object, viz. what seems good or advantageous.²⁰ This accords with our earlier suggestion that *logismos* in *De an.* 3.10 does not pick out just any process of reasoning, but specifically concerns reasoning

¹⁹ Except that Aristotle there includes pleasure (1362b5–9), whereas here it seems to be excluded: Aristotle continues the *Rh.* 1.10 passage: 'for intemperate men too perform a certain number of advantageous actions, but for the sake of pleasure, not for the sake of the advantage' (1369b10–11), and later claims that epithumia is the cause of all actions that appear pleasant (1369b15–16).

²⁰ On the notion of the advantageous (*sumpherein*), see Cooper (1999a: 265–6) and cf. Price (2001: 48–9). As I mentioned in the previous chapter (§4), contra Cooper, I see no reason to think that 'the noble' could not count as an object of boulêsis.

with a view to what the agent thinks good. (ii) The fact that, in equating action that is due to rational desire with action that is due to *logismos*, the *Rh.* chapter suggests that every *boulêsis* is indeed consequent upon reasoning or deliberation.²¹ For, if all *boulêseis* are rational, and rational desire is consequent on deliberation, then it is not simply the case that actions that are in accordance with *logismos* are in accordance with *boulêsis*, but also that actions that are in accordance with *boulêsis* are in accordance with reasoning (indeed, not merely *in accordance with* reasoning, but *owing to* reasoning; see *NE* 3.3.1113a11–12, *EE* 2.10.1226b19–20, quoted below). So although the *De an.* 3.10 text is, strictly speaking, consistent with the notion that not every *boulêsis* is consequent on reasoning, *Rhetoric* 1.10 supports the idea that Aristotle holds that all *boulêseis* are so consequent. And since *De an.* 3.10 is compatible with this thought, it may well be that Aristotle had that view in mind while composing both texts.

In this way, *Rh.* 1.10 and *De an.* 3.10 can be taken to provide a consistent account of the rational/non-rational distinction. On this view, every rational desire is (i) formed in consequence of reasoning; and (ii) for the sake of some good (in the narrow sense specified in the last chapter). Whether or not non-rational desires are permitted to satisfy (i), they must always have a different object from rational desires, and so cannot satisfy (ii). *Boulêsis* is rational because it is formed in consequence of reasoning with a view to something the agent takes to be good.

The key problem with this account is that it seems inconsistent with Aristotle's views in his ethical works.²² Aristotle does

²¹ The characterisation of the rational motivation as *logismos* of course follows Plato's characterisation in *Republic* 4; see esp. 439d1, 5; and also 441a9. And Plato also connects this motivation to what is advantageous (*sumpheron*) at e.g. 442c5–8.

²² It is also in tension with a passage (quoted and discussed in [Chapter 4](#), §2) in the next chapter of *Rh.*, in which Aristotle distinguishes 'non-rational' *epithumiai* from *epithumiai* that 'involve reason' (*meta logou*) – in so far as they are formed on the basis of persuasion or judgement (1370a16–27). As should be clear from what we have said, it is not the notion that some *epithumiai* might be consequent on reasoning that is problematic, but the fact that Aristotle distinguishes such desires from non-rational *epithumia*. For this suggests that some *epithumiai* would *not* count as non-rational, and yet in *Rh.* 1.10 he unequivocally asserts that *epithumia* is non-rational (1369a4). It seems that either Aristotle is operating with two different notions of non-rational, such that an *epithumia* can be 'doubly' non-rational (as it were), or is here refining the view that seemed implicit in 1.10, and allowing that not all *epithumiai* are non-rational after all. On the

of course recognise desires bound up with reasoning in this context. He suggests that choice (*prohairesis*) can be characterised as ‘deliberate desire’ (*bouleutikê orexis*) (*NE* 3.3.1113a11, 6.2.1139a23) and, in *NE* 3.3, explains this idea by noting that it is ‘through having selected (*krinantes*) as a result of deliberation that we desire in accordance with deliberation’ (1113a11–12).²³ This suggests that when we have chosen an action as a result of deliberation we can be said to *desire* that course of action *in virtue of* that deliberation. As Aristotle writes in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

It is clear that choice is deliberate desire (*orexis bouleutikê*) ... I call deliberate (*bouleutikê*) that of which the deliberation (*bouleusis*) is the source and cause, and the man desires because of having deliberated (*dia to bouleusasthai*). (2.10.1226b16, 19–20)

Furthermore, choices also pertain to what the agent thinks is good, rather than, for example, pleasant: Aristotle claims that we choose ‘what we best know to be good’ (3.2.1112a7–8; see also 3.2.1111b33–34, 1112a4–5), and that whereas ‘epithumia relates to the pleasant and the painful, choice relates neither to the painful nor to the pleasant’ (3.2.1111b16–18).

However, in his ethical works Aristotle also makes it clear that *boulêseis* extend beyond choices. In *NE* 3.2, he writes (in a passage we have repeatedly drawn from earlier in this book):

Neither is choice *boulêsis*, though it seems near to it; for choice cannot relate to impossibles, and if anyone said he chose them he would be thought silly; but there may be a *boulêsis* even for impossibles, e.g. for immortality. And *boulêsis* may

first reading, Aristotle would allow that there is a sense in which all the *epithumiai* mentioned in this passage are non-rational, namely, that none of them are consequent on deliberation about what one thinks good. He would then sub-divide non-rational *epithumiai* into those that are non-rational in a further sense – that they are not based on persuasion or judgement – and those that are not. On the second reading, ‘non-rational’ is being employed in the same sense in both chapters, but Aristotle has now recognised that not all *epithumiai* are non-rational in this sense: some can instead involve reason (‘now recognised’ need not mean an immediate change of mind from one chapter to the next – Kassel (1976: 52) marks the passage as a later addition by Aristotle himself). It should be noted that even on this view these *epithumiai* would not be rational in the sense specified in *Rh.* 1.10, since that requires the desire to be consequent on deliberation about what the agent *thinks good* (whereas Aristotle states at the beginning of the passage, of *epithumia* in general, that it is ‘*orexis* for the pleasant’ (1370a17–18)). But the claim from 1.10 – that *epithumia* is simply to be identified as a non-rational desire – would now be qualified somewhat.

²³ Reading *kata tēn boulesin*; see Chapter 6, n.33, above.

relate to things that could in no way be brought about by one's own efforts, e.g. that a particular actor or athlete should win a competition; but no one chooses such things, but only the things that he thinks could be brought about by his own efforts. (1111b19–26)

These points unequivocally show that *boulêsis* extends beyond choice: one can have a *boulêsis* for something that one cannot sensibly choose.²⁴

But can we conclude from this that such *boulêseis* are not formed in virtue of deliberation? Could they not perhaps be formed in virtue of deliberation even if that deliberation was not bound up with a choice? Like choice, deliberation is a normative notion for Aristotle:

We ought presumably to call not what a fool or madman would deliberate about, but what a sensible man would deliberate about, a subject of deliberation. (*NE* 3.3.1112a19–21)

And just as choice does not relate to things that are impossible or to things that are beyond our power (even if possible), neither do we deliberate about such things (*NE* 3.3.1112a21–31, *EE* 2.10.1226a20–30). For sure, in *EE* 2.10, Aristotle does allow that 'we all deliberate about what we choose, but we do not choose all that we deliberate about' (1226b17–19), but this seems to be because to choose something we need to have isolated something specific that we can do, whereas deliberation can fail to isolate something in this way. As Aristotle notes in *NE* 3.3:

The same thing is deliberated upon and is chosen, *except that* the object of choice is already determinate, since it is that which has been decided upon as a result of deliberation that is the object of choice. (1113a2–5, my emphasis)

But this means that:

if we come on an impossibility, we give up the search, e.g. if we need money and this cannot be got ... (1112b24–26)

In this way, we do not choose everything we deliberate about, even though we do deliberate about everything we choose. But in

²⁴ Or *knowingly* choose: the *EE* parallel has 'unless *ignorant* of the impossibility' (2.10.1225b35, my emphasis), rather than *NE*'s 'would be thought silly'. The claim that one can have a *boulêsis* for something one cannot choose is of course distinct from the claim that there is a sense in which no choice pertains to ends; see below, and e.g. Sorabji (1980), Wiggins (1980b), Mele (1981a).

order to exploit this difference between choice and deliberation, advocates of the view that all *boulêseis* are consequent on deliberation would have to insist that Aristotle envisaged each example in the *NE* 3.2 passage just quoted to function as follows: each of these *boulêseis* is consequent upon reasoning that was performed with a view to some end that turned out (under deliberative scrutiny) to be unachievable in the way the *boulêsis* proposed, but the agent is *nonetheless* left with the *boulêsis* in question, even though he recognises that it proposes a course of action that is impossible or beyond his power. It seems to me that the only reason one could have for thinking that each example in the 3.2 passage functioned in this way would be a prior prejudice that all *boulêseis* are consequent on reasoning or deliberation. There is simply no suggestion in the text that Aristotle envisaged any such complex scenarios.²⁵ Instead, he appears to be asserting that *boulêseis* can arise independently of one's deliberations, and so independently of what one could choose.

In fact, it is even questionable whether in his ethical works Aristotle would allow that choice – which as we have seen he characterises as desiring to act in accordance with determinate deliberations with a view to something that we think would be good – counts as a *subset* of *boulêseis*. Why did Aristotle claim that choice is ‘near’ to *boulêsis* at the beginning of the *NE* 3.2 passage? A likely answer is that choices are *for* ends that are presented by *boulêseis*. We see this stated explicitly at the beginning of *NE* 3.5:

The end, then, being what we have a *boulêsis* for (*ontos dê boulêtou men tou telous*), the things towards (*pros*) the end what we deliberate about and choose, actions concerning the latter must be according to choice and voluntary. (*NE* 3.5.1113b3–5)

Again, in *EE* 2.10, Aristotle writes:

In general, in choosing we show both what we choose and for what we choose it, the latter being that for which we choose something else, the former that which we

²⁵ I am not claiming that such a phenomenon could never happen, just that it would be atypical and that there is no reason whatsoever to think that Aristotle had such cases in mind in his examples in the *NE* 3.2 passage. There is also an obvious question of regress: presumably our first goals were not formed on the basis of deliberation, but through education, experience and training (which of course gradually incorporate more and more complex rational activities). Further, *boulêsis* will naturally be construed as *prompting* many deliberations. For both these points, see also Mele (1984: 148).

choose for something else. But it is the end that we specially have a *boulêsis* for ... (1226a11–14; cf. *EE* 2.11.1227b36–37)

On Aristotle's notion of choice, one chooses something for the sake of something: an object of choice, a *prohaireton*, it seems, is chosen for the sake of an object of *boulêsis*, a *boulêton*. Although *what* we choose, strictly speaking, is the thing that is for the sake of the end, we cannot choose something without some end, and that end is supplied by *boulêsis*.²⁶ Again, in *NE* 3.2, when distinguishing *boulêsis* from choice, Aristotle writes (in a passage I discussed in Chapter 6):

boulêsis relates more [or 'rather' (*mallon*)] to the end, choice to what contributes to the end; for instance, we have a *boulêsis* (*boulesthai*) to be healthy, but we choose the acts which will make us healthy, and we have a *boulêsis* (*boulesthai*) to be happy and say we do, but we cannot well say that we choose to be so; for, in general, choice seems to relate to the things that are in our power. (1111b26–30; cf. *EE* 2.10.1225b32–37, 1226a6–17)

A number of commentators have taken such passages to *restrict* *boulêseis* to ends.²⁷ If Aristotle did wish to restrict *boulêsis* in this way, then choices – which are for things that contribute to an end set by a *boulêsis* – could not count as *boulêseis*. Indeed, whereas Aristotle thinks that *boulêsis* is unequivocally a species of *orexis*, he seems somewhat ambivalent as to whether choice should be considered a species of desire or of thought. He not only characterises choice as 'deliberate desire' (*bouleutikê orexis*) (*NE* 3.3.1113a11; 6.2.1139a23), as we have noted, but also as 'desiderative thought' (*orektikos nous*) or 'intellectual desire' (*orexis dianoêtikê*) (*NE* 6.2.1139b4–5). This may indicate that he thinks that choices fall into a category of their own, requiring both a desire and reasoning, but not ultimately being reducible to one or the other. If he does think this, then although choices will require *boulêseis*, and could be considered to be derived from *boulêseis* in some way, they will actually be a *sui generis* state capable of moving us. In this respect, it is notable that in *De motu animalium*, Aristotle places choice *besides* *epithumia*, *thumos* and *boulêsis* on

²⁶ See also Lorenz (2009: 184–92).

²⁷ See e.g. Joachim (1951: 104), Mele (1984: 154); contrast Cooper (1999b: 242n.4); and cf. Hardie (1968: 169).

a list of movers of animals, and again characterises it as ‘sharing in both reasoning and desire’ (6.700b16–17, 23).²⁸

However, it is unclear to me that these passages unequivocally limit *boulêsis* to ends.²⁹ When the notion linking *boulêsis* to ends was first introduced, in *NE* 3.2–5, the Greek that *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984) translates ‘*boulêsis* relates rather to the end’, could also be translated ‘*boulêsis* relates *more* to the end’ (3.2.1111b26–30, just quoted).³⁰ And the *EE* parallel has a similar qualification.³¹ Furthermore, some of the examples in *NE* 3.2 seem to *dictate* that *boulêsis* can be for things that tend to ends, at least in the sense that one can have a *boulêsis* for some *x* for the sake of some *y*. As we noted in Chapter 6 (§3), Aristotle’s examples of *boulêseis* that we have categorised as hopes (a *boulêsis* that a particular actor or athlete should win a competition: *NE* 3.2.1111b24, quoted above) do not seem to state *any* desirability feature. Thus Aristotle must be envisaging the states of affairs hoped for as desired for the sake of some end not stated. In Chapter 6 I suggested that this could be the honour that the athlete or actor winning might bring on the desirer’s city. If this is right, the *boulêsis* could be characterised as desiring that some athlete win in so far as that would bestow honour on the city. But then *boulêsis* is not restricted to ends, but can be for things that would bring about ends. It may well be the case that a *boulêsis* is not fully stated unless one has stated the end desired (so the examples of hopes would not be fully stated), but that is consistent with the notion that *boulêseis* can also specify means or constituents of that end.³² And if *boulêseis* can specify means to or constituents of an end, then it seems that there is no reason to think that they could not *be* choices, at least in so far as choices can be characterised as selecting something for the sake of something else (see esp. *EE* 2.11.1227b36–37: ‘for

²⁸ Nussbaum (1978: 38–9) is clearly right to read *boulêsin* rather than *boulên* in 700b18 (hence we have *boulêsis* at 700b22).

²⁹ Contra Mele (1984: 154).

³⁰ ἡ μὲν βούλησις τοῦ τέλους ἐστὶ μᾶλλον.

³¹ ‘*Boulêsis* (*boulêsthai*) and opinion relate especially (*malista*) to the end’ (2.10.1226a16).

³² The question is whether *boulêsis* is simply of the end, or can also be for things *pros* an end. It has frequently been noted that *x* being *pros y* is not limited to *x* being an instrumental means to *y*, but could also include e.g. *x* in part constituting *y*.

all choice is of something and for the sake of something’).³³ This would still accord with Aristotle’s clear aim to distinguish *boulêsis* from choice in *NE* 3.2, as can be seen if we consider what he claims about the relation between opinion (*doxa*) and choice:

If opinion precedes choice or accompanies it, that makes no difference; for it is not this we are considering, but whether it is *identical* with some kind of opinion. (*NE* 3.2.1112a11–13)

With respect to *boulêsis*, Aristotle only considers whether choice and *boulêsis* are identical – and they clearly are not because *boulêsis* extends beyond the scope of things we can choose – not whether choice is identical with a *certain kind* of *boulêsis*.³⁴ And, if it were, this would clearly provide a sense in which choice is ‘near’ *boulêsis* (1111b19–20). On this view, choices can actually be identified with a subset of *boulêsis*, namely, those that, consequent upon deliberation, involve resolving on something determinate to do with a view to a good that is within one’s power.³⁵

For our current purposes, we do not need to consider this issue further. For even the notion that *boulêseis* need not be consequent upon deliberation (whether or not choices count as a kind of *boulêsis*) is enough to undermine the applicability to Aristotle’s ethical writings of the *Rh./De an.* account of why *boulêsis* is rational. For if Aristotle does not in these ethical works think that all *boulêseis* are formed in consequence of deliberation, he evidently cannot think in these works that it is the fact that *boulêseis* are consequent

³³ Note that in the *Rh.* passage we quoted earlier in this section, Aristotle allowed that ‘through *logismos* [occur] things that seem to be advantageous (*ta dokounta sumpherein*) on the basis of goods that have been mentioned *either as an end or as tending to (pros) an end*’ (1369b7–9, my emphasis). However, just as *boulêsis* does not here seem limited to ends, nor perhaps is choice limited to things *pros* ends in *Rh.* (see e.g. 1.6.1363a19–21, where the backwards reference suggests that objects of choice include ends (i.e. given 1.6.1362a21–23)).

³⁴ Choice is not *boulêsis simpliciter* (*haplôs*), but it might be *boulêsis* in this qualified sense (*ouch haplôs*); see *EE* 2.10.1227a3–5.

³⁵ Even if choice is a subset of *boulêsis*, something one has a *boulêsis* for is still tied to an end (choice is ‘of something for the sake of something’: 1227b36–37). And so the characterisation of the *boulêton* I provided in the previous chapter (§4), in so far as that picks out the ends of *boulêsis*, can stand. The notion that the akratic acts contrary to his *boulêsis* (*NE* 5.9.1136b6–9) could plausibly be read as consistent with either view. For the akratic will act contrary to the *boulêton* that his choice is formed with a view to, even if the choice is not itself characterisable as a *boulêsis*.

upon deliberation with a view to something one thinks good that accounts for their rational status.

At this point, it is perhaps worth noting that although Aristotle does claim that *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational affections (*aloga pathê*) in the *NE* (3.1.1111b1), he does not explicitly claim in either the *NE* or the *EE* that *boulêsis* is rational.³⁶ This invites the conjecture that it might not be the notion that rational desire is consequent upon reasoning or deliberation that Aristotle has given up in the ethical writings, but the idea that each *boulêsis* is rational. If this were right, Aristotle would still hold the *Rh.* 1.10/*De an.* 3.10 account of what makes a desire *rational* in the ethical writings, but would maintain that since *boulêsis* extends beyond reasoning or deliberation, it is not unequivocally rational. On this view, wishes and hopes would not count as rational desires, even if other *boulêseis* do. But before we conclude this, we should first consider another option, which takes me to my final account of Aristotle's rational/non-rational distinction.

5. Desires that require rationality to grasp their basic object versus those that do not so require rationality

The account we garnered from *Rhetoric* 1.10 and *De an.* 3.10 was that *boulêsis* is rational because it is formed in consequence of reasoning with a view to something the agent thinks good. We have seen that in the ethical writings Aristotle does not appear to hold the view that each *boulêsis* is formed in consequence of deliberation. Rather than taking this to signify that Aristotle would therefore be unable to consider each instance of *boulêsis* to be rational in these works, one might instead suggest that he now takes it that only the end of the desire is relevant to determine its rational status, not whether or not that desire was formed in consequence of reasoning or deliberation. Indeed, if one can have *epithumiai* that

³⁶ Aristotle does refer to rational motivations in *NE* 1.13 (1102b14–16; cf. also e.g. *NE* 3.1.1111a33–34), but he does not specifically identify these as *boulêseis* (and, indeed, at 1102a23–32, he distances himself to a certain extent from the rational/non-rational division that he nonetheless finds it convenient to employ).

are formed in consequence of reasoning processes,³⁷ then even though Aristotle seems to think in *Rh.* I.10 that it is a general feature of rational desires that they are formed in consequence of deliberation,³⁸ it may well seem that it was in any event the general end of the desire (with a view to which these deliberations were performed) that was doing the real work in determining its rational status. But why might Aristotle think that the object of the desire, rather than whether or not the desire is formed in consequence of deliberation, determines its rational status? The general idea would presumably be that grasping the object of desire in some cases requires the agent to be a rational creature, owing to, say, its cognitive organisation, or the complexity of the value it represents.³⁹ Accordingly, a desire for such an end would thereby itself be classified as rational or stemming from the rational part of the soul. By contrast, non-rational desires will be those that do not require one to be a rational creature in this way. But this suggestion requires further clarification.

First, it is important to see that the current proposal is distinct from the account we considered in §1, which attempted to account for the rational status of a desire by reference to the notion that it involved reason or thoughts in its formation. The present suggestion is that a desire is rational if grasping its object requires one to be a rational creature. Strictly speaking, this does not entail that reason is involved in the formation of the desire, either as a trigger of it or in grasping its object. Roger's desire to go jogging for the sake of health could be triggered by him *seeing* someone jog past him, but assuming that it is plausible to think that only rational creatures can desire to do something qua healthy, such a desire would count as rational in the sense we are envisaging. Again, some

³⁷ See the *Rh.* passage considered in n.22, and also the deliberative akratic discussed in Chapter 6 (end of §4) (who deliberates how best to achieve his akratic end, but does not count as acting on a choice because he acts for the sake of an *epithumia*, not a *boulêsis*). Although, for the latter character to be relevant, it must be the case that when the deliberative akratic desires in accordance with his deliberation, that deliberative desire is *itself* characterisable as an *epithumia*, not merely *for* an *epithumia* (as with the parallel with choice and *boulêsis* already discussed).

³⁸ Note that although the *Rh.* passage allows rational desires to be for means and ends (1369b7–9, quoted above, see also n.33 above), it still seems to view the desires in question as consequent on reasoning ('through *logismos* occur ...').

³⁹ Cf. Raz's (1999b: 68) notion of 'capacity-rationality'.

object of desire might happen to be envisaged through perceptual phantasia, even though *to be able* to envisage it at all requires one to be a rational creature (the agent might, for example, have a phantasia-based daydream that represents him in a desirable way that only rational creatures can, and form a desire accordingly).⁴⁰ Equally, on the current proposal, non-rational desires are those that do not require one to be a rational creature in order to grasp their object (see below for the sense of ‘object of desire’ in question), but this does not entail that they *cannot* involve thought in their formation. Thus, the fact (discussed in §1) that non-rational desires can be triggered by thoughts, and (most likely) can involve grasping their objects through reason, is consistent with the current proposal. For, in general, what distinguishes rational from non-rational desires, on this view, is not the faculty which is involved in a desire’s formation, but whether the object of desire demands that one be a rational creature in order to desire it.

Second, the sense in which rational desires are those where the object of desire requires one to be a rational creature needs to be clarified. On the surface, it seems that any number of *epithumiai* (even on the narrow notion of this desire) and *thumoi* might aim at something that only rational creatures can desire. In *NE* 3.11, Aristotle claims that we do not just have general *epithumiai* for food and drink and sex, but also particular *epithumiai* for specific kinds of food, drink or sex (see [Chapter 4](#), §1). The latter are *epithumiai* that we have acquired and developed, and so which are ‘our very own’ (1118b8–13). But then it seems likely that some of these *epithumiai* might have contents that would make it impossible for non-rational creatures to possess them. Suppose one had an *epithumia* for wine that has been made from a particular grape, or for some food that is only available in a certain season; such *epithumiai* would likely be beyond the capacity of

⁴⁰ Just as rational agents seem able to perceive the significance of certain signs or situations in a way that is beyond the capacity of non-rational creatures, without employing reason or thoughts; e.g. road signs. In fact, although there is no reason to doubt that rational desires can be triggered by non-rational capacities, Aristotle’s claim that no one has a *boulêsis* for what he does not think good (references provided in [Chapter 6](#), §4, pp. 161–2), may well suggest that he thinks that grasping an object of *boulêsis* requires thought. I am not meaning to deny this in the text, but merely explaining how the current proposal differs from the one discussed in §1.

non-rational creatures (even if the creature could enjoy the wine or the food, it would seem unlikely that it could desire these things under the relevant descriptions). This is clearer still with thumos. Thumos, as *orgê*, is prompted by a slight, and slights may perhaps be difficult to discern, or otherwise only comprehensible to creatures with the capacity for language (if, say, the slight is oral or written).⁴¹ Similarly, retaliation may naturally take forms that would require the creature to possess rationality. But if *epithumiai* and *thumoi* can be beyond the capacity of non-rational creatures in this way, the current proposal would seem to entail that such instances of the desires would count as rational, and yet this is clearly the wrong result.

The best response to this, for the view under consideration, is to insist that the notion of ‘object of desire’ that the account picks out is the general or basic end of the desire (what I have also called the correlative objects of the desires), not the specific content or particular object of the desire. Even though an *epithumia* for wine made from a certain grape might require rationality, that desire is ultimately for bodily pleasure, and bodily pleasure is a basic end that we share with non-rational creatures. And although various specific desires for retaliation in response to specific slights will require rationality, retaliation is intended by Aristotle to be an end that non-rational as well as rational creatures can want (see [Chapter 5](#), §3). *Epithumia* and *thumos* count as non-rational, on this view, not because there cannot be instances of these desires that could not be undergone by non-rational creatures. Indeed, it is clear that Aristotle thinks that there can be such desires because he claims that *epithumiai* and *thumoi* can be formed in response to reason, and so non-rational creatures, lacking reason, would not be able to possess *epithumiai* and *thumoi* in precisely that form. Instead,

⁴¹ Recall, in *Rh.* 2.2 Aristotle characterises slight as having three species: contempt (*kataphronêsis*), spite (*epêreasmos*), and insult (*hubris*) (1378b14–15). Each type of slight (1378b14–25) will often fairly naturally be taken as requiring rationality in order to be experienced. We feel *contempt*, Aristotle tells us, for whatever we consider unimportant (he later gives the example of how those eager to win fame in philosophy may get angry at those who show contempt for their philosophy (1379a34–37)); we manifest *spite* when we thwart another man’s wishes just to prevent him from getting the thing in question (i.e. without us seeking to get the thing for ourselves); and *insult* consists in doing and saying things that cause shame to the victim simply for the pleasure this brings us (i.e. not for some further purpose or because anything has happened to us).

epithumia and thumos count as non-rational because grasping their basic ends does not require one to be a rational creature.⁴²

This view has further advantages. In §2, we considered the view that non-rational desires are so called because they aim at bodily gratification, whereas rational desires are not tied to the body in this way. There were a number of problems with this view, which the current account solves. First, we noted that Aristotle has two different notions of epithumia; one in which it is tied to (certain kinds of) bodily pleasures, and another in which it extends to non-bodily pleasures as well. The account in §2 obviously only fitted the narrow notion of epithumia. But the current account can plausibly deal with both. For even epithumiai for ‘pleasures of soul’, e.g. for the pleasure of learning, are still pleasure-based, and so can be considered to be grounded in an object of desire that we share with non-rational creatures. On this view, pleasure *simpliciter* is the grounding object of epithumia and, even though pleasure can come in non-bodily forms, as a basic end it is something we share with non-rational creatures. Second, it seemed that a desire for retaliation (as the object of thumos) would often be inappropriately characterised as a desire for something bodily; there being little reason to think that a desire for retaliation must always aim at

⁴² Contrast Broadie (1991: 106–7), who holds that *boulêsis* is rational because it is for objects that are ‘at a distance’, such that ‘the mere desiring of them does not automatically carry with it instinctive action of a sort that would tend to satisfy the desire’ (1991: 106), whereas epithumia and thumos are non-rational because it is characteristic of these desires that they ‘automatically tend to their own satisfaction without mediation by reflective thought’ (1991: 107). This account not only does not fit the broad notion of epithumia (since it is unclear how e.g. an epithumia to learn could automatically tend to its own satisfaction ‘without mediation by reflective thought’), it also seems unable to account for many epithumiai in the narrow sense. Perhaps e.g. one is overcome with thirst while in an important meeting, but there is no water available. One may then have to weigh up whether the intensity of the desire is sufficient to warrant leaving the meeting, even given the potential awkwardness and embarrassment this would involve; and, if one does decide to leave, one may then have to identify suitable means to satisfy one’s desire, such as isolating the nearest water fountain or bathroom tap (cf. also the deliberative akratic (NE 6.9.1142b18–20) we have discussed in Chapter 6, §4). Again, the revenge associated with thumos may require plotting before it can be realised. Finally, it is also unclear why some *boulêseis* could not be such that they tend to their own satisfaction without mediation by reflective thought. My requiring view can get around these problems because the goods that *boulêseis* aim at can be such that only rational creatures could desire them, e.g. owing to their complexity or because of the sort of interest or concern they involve, whether or not they happen to be ‘near’ or ‘at a distance’, in Broadie’s sense (see below for more on the broad notion of epithumia).

physical contact. But this is not problematic for the current view either. For, so long as the general end of thumos, viz. retaliation, is something that non-rational creatures can desire, it does not matter whether instances of this desire are for something bodily or not. Third, we questioned whether some *boulêseis* might not count as aiming at something bodily, e.g. a *boulêsis* for health (*NE* 3.2.1111b27). This again is unproblematic for the view under consideration. For although health is a state of the body, for Aristotle, it is plausible that only rational creatures can desire health under that description. Non-rational creatures might desire to do things that are in fact healthy for them, but it seems likely that only rational creatures can desire to do something qua healthy.⁴³

There is a parallel to be drawn, I think, between the notion that it is the basic end of a desire that determines its rational or non-rational status and a move that Aristotle makes in the *ergon* ('function') argument in *NE* 1.7. There, in seeking the *ergon* of man, Aristotle excludes as possible candidates the life of nutrition and growth, on the basis that this is common even to plants, and the life of sensation, on the ground that this is common to the horse and the ox, and indeed every other animal (1097b33–1098a3). Apparently, the fact that humans *share* these capacities with non-rational creatures means that they cannot be, not even *part of*, the human function. But of course it seems possible that a life of sensation for humans could involve an interest in objects that non-rational creatures could not partake of. Dominic might, for example, devote his life to drinking claret of a particular year on the ground that '*that* is the only year worth drinking' (scoff). In such a scenario, Dominic's life would be a life of sensation, i.e. orientated towards tasting and drinking as much of this claret as possible, but in so far as it was based on a belief about the quality of fine wines, it would be beyond the capacity of non-rational animals. Nevertheless, a life of sensation is ruled out by

⁴³ And, in general, given the criterion I provided for grouping the ends that can count as grounding a *boulêsis* in the previous chapter (§4), it is easy to see that each such desire will come out as rational on the current account, as is required. Contrast my account with accounts that insist that *boulêsis* is rational because it is for (the agent's conception of) eudaimonia (Anscombe (1965: 155), Nussbaum (1978: 335–6), Mele (1984: 151)), a view I have de facto already ruled out in the last chapter by undermining the notion that all *boulêseis* are for (the agent's conception of) eudaimonia.

Aristotle as a candidate for the human *ergon* on the ground that we share the capacity for sensation with lower animals. And Aristotle would say, I suggest, that although Dominic's life is one that only a rational creature could have, *still* it is a life of sensation, and *this* we share with non-rational creatures. Similarly, the current proposal suggests that the fact that we share e.g. *epithumiai*, pleasure-based desires in general, with non-rational creatures means that there will always remain, for Aristotle, something non-rational about each occurrence of such a desire, even in the more complex human manifestations of it. Since the capacity to be motivated by pleasure first arises in the hierarchy of capacities at a very low level, i.e. among non-rational creatures (see [Chapter 4](#), §1), and all *epithumiai* (on either the broad or the narrow notion) are pleasure-based, *any* *epithumia*, on Aristotle's view, will retain a non-rational component just in virtue of being directed at the root value of pleasure.⁴⁴

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered Aristotle's division of desires into rational and non-rational. I argued against (several versions of) the view that *boulêsis* is rational because each instance of it involves thought in its formation, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* do not. I also argued against (several versions of) the view that *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they are tied to the body in a way that *boulêsis* is not. And I argued against the

⁴⁴ Cf. also the following passage from *NE* 9.8: 'Those who use the term ['lover of self'] as one of reproach ascribe self-love to people who assign to themselves the greater share of wealth, honours, and bodily pleasures; for these are what most people desire (*oregontai*), and busy themselves about as though they were the best of all things, which is the reason, too, why they become objects of competition. So those who are grasping with regard to these things gratify their *epithumiai*, and in general their emotions (*pathê*) and the non-rational part of their soul' (1168b15–21). Here, desires for ends that non-rational animals can also desire (bodily pleasures) are lumped together with desires for ends they cannot (wealth, honours), and lined up with gratifying *epithumiai*, emotions, and the non-rational part of our soul. This makes sense, on the current proposal, because what makes a desire pertain to the non-rational part of the soul is whether it is grounded in a basic end that can also motivate non-rational animals. And we are to assume, I take it, that the agents in question desire wealth or honours for the pleasure that results, or because it reflects some other motive that we share with non-rational animals, such as responses to basic emotional states.

view that *boulêsis* is rational because it is in some way responsive to a judgement as to the appropriateness of the object desired, whereas *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational because they are not responsive in this way. Each of these views fails either because it seems plausible to think that *boulêsis* would sometimes come out as non-rational on the proposed criterion, or because *epithumia* and/or *thumos* would sometimes come out as rational. A view that appeared to have some textual support was that *boulêsis* is rational because it is consequent upon reasoning or deliberation, whereas non-rational desires are not. Upon further examination, however, the end that the deliberation was performed with a view to seemed integral to the account, and so the possibility was created that Aristotle would allow that some desires consequent upon deliberation would actually count as non-rational. But even the notion that all rational desires are consequent upon deliberation did not seem to fit certain key passages in Aristotle's ethical writings. Rather than give up on the idea that Aristotle would in these works consider every instance of *boulêsis* to be rational, I suggested instead that he could retain that idea if he thought that in fact the basic end of the desire was the only crucial factor in determining whether it was rational or non-rational. In order for this view to be plausible, he must have in mind the root or base (correlative) objects of the species of desire, since it seems likely that he would allow that some specific goals of *epithumia* or *thumos* could be beyond the capacity of non-rational creatures to aim at.

Appendix: Deliberation and conscious processes

The view that *boulêsis* is rational because it is consequent on deliberation would probably be naturally understood as maintaining that *boulêsis* is rational because it is formed in virtue of an *explicitly cognised* process of deliberation. However, John Cooper (1999b) resists this elaboration of the view. Although, on his view, *boulêsis* is 'the practical expression of a course of thought about what is good for oneself, that is aimed at working out the truth about what *is* in fact good' (1999b: 242), he does not think that the desire requires that the agent has *actually done* any such investigating

into the truth about what is good. Instead, all it requires on his view 'is that a *logos*-thought and a *logos*-desire are about the good in a way that lays claim to there being a reason for thinking this, and to thinking it for that reason' (1999b: 242). Cooper appears to be alluding to an account he provided in an earlier book, whereby deliberation for Aristotle need not require an explicit (consciously entertained) process of reasoning, but could more simply just indicate reasons for acting (1986: 9–10), and so only *represent* such a course of reasoning. On this view, a desire can represent a deliberative argument in favour of Φ -ing, even if it is not the result of an actual process of deliberation.⁴⁵ Cooper's reading saves Aristotle in an important respect. For Aristotle appears to think both that deliberation is an essential component of choice, and also that choosing one's action is required for that action to be virtuous (*NE* 2.4.1105a31, 6.12.1144a19). But, as many commentators note, it seems implausible to think that only those actions which are consequent on an active process of deliberation can count as virtuous (as Aristotle himself on occasion appears to recognise as well; see e.g. *NE* 3.8.1117a18–22). Alfred Mele (1981a, cf. also 1981b) offers an alternative account of deliberation (*bouleusis*) that also attempts to save Aristotle in this respect. On his reading, deliberation can refer not just to active processes, but also to 'passive processes of practical inference' (1981a: 285). If, for instance, 'I want to eat the apple that I see, recognise that I may put myself in a position to do this by taking it from the bowl with my hand, and proceed accordingly to take it from the bowl', then I may be said to have made a practical inference (1981a: 284). Although we would not ordinarily count such an inference as 'deliberation', it would count as deliberation (*boulêusis*) for Aristotle, on Mele's account.

However, there are grounds for doubting that Aristotle would recognise either of these extended senses of deliberation. One problem is that in *EE* 2.10 Aristotle distinguishes choice from *boulêsis* on the ground that *boulêseis* can arise suddenly or in a flash (*exaiphnês*), whereas no one, on his view, chooses suddenly (1226b3–4; cf. *EE* 2.8.1224a3–4, *NE* 8.3.1156b31–32). Choice

⁴⁵ See also Broadie (1991: 79–80, 211–2), McDowell (1998: 23–4).

requires 'consideration' or 'examination' (*skepsis*) and 'council' (*boulê*) (1226b8), whereas *boulêsis*, apparently, does not. This passage thus seems to make deliberation temporally extended.⁴⁶ If so, the tension in Aristotle's view remains, and so does the philosophical implausibility. Another problem is that in *NE* 3.3 and 6.9 Aristotle calls deliberation a form of inquiry or search (*zêtêsis*: 1112b20; 1142a31–32, 15). Mele (1981a: 283–90) argues (with the help of *Mem.* 2.453a11–26, which views recollection as a species of search, but does not demand that every recollecting requires actual seeking) that this is consistent with Aristotle allowing deliberation to extend to 'passive' practical inferences. Mele also points to *De motu an.* 7, where Aristotle claims that in some cases of practical inference the mind does not stop to consider an obvious premise. However, it should be noted that Aristotle also refers to these cases as 'without calculating' (*mê logisamenoi*: 701a29), and so they perhaps should not be thought of as deliberations either. More generally, a problem for Mele's account is that reducing deliberation to a practical inference might let in too much. Why cannot non-rational animals perform such inferences? If they can, they would count as deliberating. But then they would be able to form choices, and yet Aristotle explicitly denies this (*NE* 3.2.1111b8–9).

⁴⁶ It also seems to distinguish between choice and *boulêsis* precisely on the ground that the former is based on deliberation, whereas the latter need not be, and thus the passage seems explicitly to count against the view that all *boulêseis* are consequent upon deliberation.

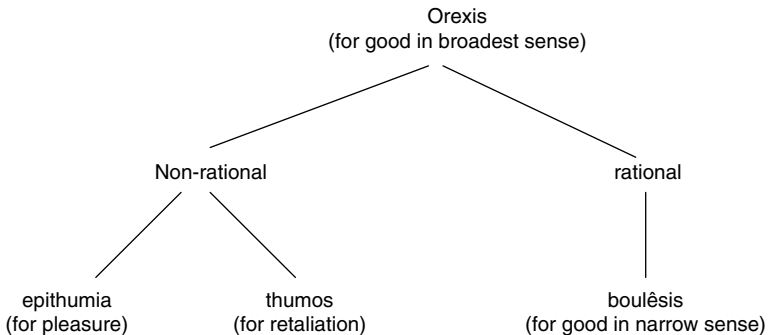
PART III

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 8

SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT ARISTOTLE'S BROAD AND NARROW NOTIONS OF DESIRE

In Part I of this book I considered the range of states that Aristotle counts as orexeis; provided some general considerations about his understanding of objects of desire; and scrutinised the relation he takes to hold between orexis and the good. In Part II I examined Aristotle's basic taxonomy of desiderative states. Schematically, it can be represented as follows:



In [Chapters 4, 5](#) and [6](#), I considered the objects of epithumia, thumos and boulêsis respectively; and I have just attempted, in [Chapter 7](#), to explain Aristotle's view that boulêsis is rational whereas epithumia and thumos are non-rational.

In this third and final part of the book I offer some further reflections in the light of the account of desire that has emerged. In the present chapter I provide some more general considerations about Aristotle's broad and narrow notions of desire, and some critical reflections about his specific division of desire into three species. In [Chapter 9](#) I explore Aristotle's account of moral psychology in

relation to some aspects of that account that have come to the surface at various points in the course of this book.

1. Aristotle's broad notion of desire and some current views

Aristotle's notion of *orexis*, we have noted, is a very broad notion of desire, encompassing rational and non-rational states that aim at the good in the broad sense specified in [Chapter 3](#). It is sometimes suggested, particularly by philosophers who are resisting a 'Humean' account of motivation, that such a very broad notion of desire is somewhat uninteresting or insubstantial. Roughly, a Humean account of motivation posits that agents are motivated by belief–desire pairs – a desire for some end coupled with a coordinate belief about how to achieve that end – where the belief and desire are independently intelligible. For example, suppose that I want a cool beer. This desire coupled with the belief that there is cool beer in the fridge, on the Humean account, will be what explains my being motivated to go to the fridge to pull out a beer. Non-Humean theories of motivation will deny that pairs of independently intelligible beliefs and desires are required for motivation. They will claim either that the agent's beliefs alone are capable of motivating him, or at least that any desire that is required is only consequential on the fact of motivation, and not independently intelligible. Such philosophers will often insist that the notion of desire in which a desire is required for motivation is only a trivially broad one. For example, Thomas Nagel claims that the notion that all intentional actions are motivated by a desire 'is true only in the sense that *whatever* may be the motivation for someone's intentional pursuit of a goal, it becomes in virtue of his pursuit *ipso facto* appropriate to ascribe to him a desire for that goal' (1970: 29).¹ Thus, a desire, on Nagel's view, is not necessary either as 'a contributing influence' or as 'a causal condition' of what motivates (1970: 30). Similarly, Thomas Scanlon writes:

¹ See also e.g. McDowell (1978).

'Desire' is sometimes used in a broad sense in which the class of desires is taken to include any 'pro-attitude' that an agent may have toward an action or outcome, whatever the content or basis of this attitude may be. Desires in this sense include such things as a sense of duty, loyalty, or pride, as well as an interest in pleasure or enjoyment. It is uncontroversial that desires in this broad sense are capable of moving us to act, and it is plausible to claim that they are the only things capable of this, since anything that moves us (at least to intentional action) is likely to count as such a desire. (1998: 37)

By 'uncontroversial' Scanlon appears to mean 'uninteresting', since he then goes on to claim that a 'substantial thesis claiming a special role for desires in moving us to act would have to be based on some narrower class of desires, which can be claimed to serve as independent sources of motivation' (1998: 37).

For these philosophers Aristotle's broad notion of desire will seem uninteresting and not of any philosophical significance. For, as we have noted in [Chapter 1](#) (§5), Aristotle identifies the *orektikon* as the part or capacity of us in virtue of which we are moved to intentional action (*De an.* 3.9–10), and *orexis* as the 'proximate reason' (*eschatê aitia*) for movement (*De motu an.* 7.701a34–35). Worse still, as we also discussed in [Chapter 1](#) (§5), Aristotle's notion of *orexis* not only extends to every action-prompting desire, but also beyond this to hopes and idle wishes as well (see also [Chapter 2](#), §2). *Orexis* thus appears *even broader* than a notion of desire that is tied to intentional action in general. It thus does indeed seem to extend to any 'pro-attitude' an agent may have toward an action or outcome (although see below) – indeed, even to outcomes that the agent recognises it is impossible for him to bring about. With this in mind, in the remainder of the present section I would like to explain why I nevertheless believe that Aristotle's notion of *orexis* *is* interesting and not insubstantial. If I am right, the same could obviously apply to other broad notions of 'desire'.

(a) *Orexis as including action-prompting and non-action-prompting states*

Let me first address the fact that *orexis* includes not just action-prompting desires but also hopes and wishes. In order for a concept that encompasses all such states to be a helpful one, it must

serve to distinguish the states that are so grouped from others. I suggested in [Chapter 3](#) that a key respect in which all orexeis are grouped together is that they are all directed at some good. Action-prompting desires are directed at realising some good, but even wishes and hopes involve construing some state of affairs as one that it would be good to have occur (even if only fleetingly, as may be the case with wishes, or even though the agent recognises that he can do nothing to bring about the good in question, as with hopes). But this grouping of orexeis as directed at some good might not seem to help much with the matter at hand since the notion of ‘good’ in play is itself incredibly broad, encompassing as it does all the ends of animal and human desire, whether action-prompting or not. But, in fact, the way in which orexis is connected to the ‘good’ serves to distinguish it from at least *three* other kinds of state.

First, the connection between orexis and the good obviously serves to distinguish orexis from *aversion* (*phugê*). Aristotle in general has less to say about aversions than orexeis, but he clearly thinks that his analysis of desire is meant to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to aversions (see e.g. *De an.* 3.7.431a8–17, 431b2–10).² If this applies across the spectrum of desiderative states that Aristotle acknowledges, it suggests that there would be aversions corresponding not just to action-prompting orexeis, but also to hopes and wishes. The former would be states that prompt us to *avoid* performing some action, where some presumed negative feature(s) of an action motivate us to avoid it. Aversions corresponding to hopes could be characterised as some kind of *fear*: just as one might hope that one’s favoured athlete or actor will win the competition (*NE* 3.2.1111b24), so too one might *fear* that the (firm-favourite) rival athlete or actor will actually win. Aversions corresponding to idle wishes could perhaps be characterised as *idle resentments*: just as one might wish to be immortal (while recognising this to be impossible) (*NE* 3.2.1111b22–23), so too one might resent being mortal (while recognising that there is no alternative). In general, then, acknowledging the category of orexeis serves at least to distinguish all such states from contra-attitudes; attitudes that involve

² I consider some aversions one might form in the context of courage in the next chapter.

seeing something *bad* about some action or state of affairs. We, in effect, divide evaluative psychological states into those that are positive (hence 'pro-'), on the one hand, and those that are negative ('contra-'), on the other.³

Second, in addition, orexeis are in fact also distinguished from those (pro- and contra-) evaluative psychological states that are directed neither at prospects nor counterfactual scenarios, but that instead simply *register* some evaluative experience. Pleasures and pains are examples of such states, since there seems to be a difference between experiencing some pleasure or pain, on the one hand, and *desiring* to experience that pleasure or being *averse* to experiencing that pain, on the other. Not all pro-attitudes count as desires, and not all contra-attitudes count as aversions.

David Charles (2006) appears to maintain that Aristotle would deny the claim I have just made and hold instead that being pleasurably affected by something is simply another way of describing desiring it. Charles writes:

perceiving A as pleasant, being pleasurably affected by A, and [sensually] desiring A are not distinct types of activity, instances of one occurring after instances of the other. Rather, there is just one type of activity which can be described in three different ways. (2006: 21)⁴

However, desiring A implies that one does not currently 'have' A in the precise sense in which one desires it. One might desire to work one's way through a case of Château Lafite Rothschild while picnicking on the lawns of Buckingham Palace (well, one *might*), but no matter how much one may enjoy the prospect of such a scenario there is a gap between one's desire and 'the real thing'. This means that in order for it to be true that desiring A and being pleasurably affected by A refer to the same activity, Charles cannot be referring to *actually being* pleasurably affected by A (in the very respect one desires it) but must instead be referring to 'being pleasurably affected by the *prospect* of A'. Now it is a

³ For discussion of the distinction between 'pro-' and 'contra-' (or 'con-') attitudes, see Nowell-Smith (1954: 112–21) and especially Williamson (1970).

⁴ There are a number of ways one might resist this. I shall just focus on the one relevant to my considerations here: that taking pleasure in something is the same as desiring it. I should note that Charles gets his reading from *De an.* 3.7.431a8–17. I cannot consider that passage here, but hope to on another occasion. Cf. also Tuozeo (1994).

further question whether each desire requires the agent to have a pleasurable anticipation of the object of desire in this respect, but this need not concern us now.⁵ All I am now emphasising is that there is a difference between orexeis (which involve envisaging prospects or counterfactual scenarios; see [Chapter 2](#)) and other evaluative psychological states that simply register our encounters. And this distinction would apply even if desires generally involve being pleasurable affected by the prospect of the object of desire.

Third, the fact that all orexeis are directed at goods, in the sense I have specified, also serves to distinguish them from states that are *merely* discriminative and so not evaluative in either of the ways we have just considered. Aristotle groups together perception, phantasia and thought as states that he calls *kritika*, that is, discerning or discriminative capacities (*De motu an.* 6.700b20; cf. also *De an.* 3.9.432a16). Such capacities obviously can register evaluative information, and can even grasp objects of desire, but they *need not* do so. One can simply perceive that the son of Diares is white (*De an.* 2.6.418a21), have a phantasia of the sun as a foot across (*De an.* 3.3.428b3–4), or think that the diagonal is incommensurable (*De an.* 3.6.430a31) without either registering or envisaging those things as good or bad, even in the broadest significations of ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Aristotle’s notion of orexis, then, even though it ranges over both action-prompting and non-action-prompting states, still serves to set it apart from various other psychological states, and so is not completely fatuous.

(b) Orexis as the capacity that is responsible for movement

Now let me specifically address Nagel’s and Scanlon’s claim that the notion that all action is motivated by a desire employs a trivially broad notion of ‘desire’. Even if, as I have suggested, orexeis are distinguished not just from *contra*-attitudes, but also from other evaluative psychological states, and from non-evaluative psychological states, it might still be thought that the notion that

⁵ I offer an argument against the suggestion at the end of my [2011b](#).

all actions are motivated by desires must be employing an 'insubstantial' notion of desire. As Scanlon notes, it is 'uncontroversial' that states that are picked out by such a broad notion of 'desire' are capable of moving us, since 'anything that moves us (at least to intentional action) is likely to count as such a desire' (1998: 37). Can anything be said in response to this charge?

In fact, there are two points to make. First, as the parenthesis in the above quotation from Scanlon reveals, insisting that all intentional actions are motivated by a desire does at least serve to demarcate intentional or voluntary actions from *unintentional* or *involuntary* actions (cf. *De an.* 3.9.432b14–17).⁶ For if an action was performed voluntarily, that entails, on the broad notion of desire, that it was desired. If one goes for a jog in freezing cold weather, or eats some rather depressing looking salad, and does so voluntarily, then it must in some sense be appropriate to say that one desired to do these things. Were you dragged out in the cold against your will? Did you eat the salad because you had been drugged? – No? Then, in the absence of any other such feature, you must have desired to perform those actions. And presumably you desired to perform them in so far as you thought that they would contribute to your health, or because you had promised someone, or for some other such reason. In general, then, to say that an action was performed voluntarily entails that it was desired, and this serves to distinguish it from an involuntary action, which need not be desired.⁷

If every voluntary action is desired, can we also say that every action that proceeds from desire is voluntary? On the one hand, Aristotle provides a variety of reasons to think that in general actions that proceed from *orexis* (explicitly, *epithumia* and *thumos*) *are* voluntary:

Presumably acts done by reason of *thumos* or *epithumia* are not rightly called *involuntary*. For in the first place, on that showing none of the other animals will act

⁶ In what follows, I shall freely interchange 'intentional'/'unintentional' with 'voluntary'/'involuntary', as rough translations of Aristotle's *hekousia/akousia* (discussed e.g. in *NE* 3.1).

⁷ The claim has to be that actions that are not performed intentionally *need not* be desired, rather than *are not*, to allow for the possibility that someone might unintentionally perform an action that they nonetheless desired to perform.

voluntarily, nor will children; and secondly, is it meant that we do not do voluntarily any of the acts that are due to *epithumia* or *thumos*, or that we do the noble acts voluntarily and the base acts involuntarily? Is not this absurd, when one and the same thing is the cause? But it would surely be odd to describe as involuntary the things one ought to desire (*oregesthai*); and we ought both to be angry (*orgizesthai*) at certain things and to have *epithumiai* (*epithumêin*) for certain things, e.g. for health and for learning. Also what is involuntary is thought to be painful, but what is in accordance with *epithumia* is thought to be pleasant. Again, what is the difference in respect of involuntariness between errors committed upon calculation and those committed in accordance with *thumos*? Both are to be avoided, but the non-rational passions are thought not less human than reason is, and therefore also the actions which proceed from *thumos* or *epithumia* are the man's actions. It would be odd, then, to treat them as involuntary. (*NE* 3.1.1111a24–b3)

However, in another passage, Aristotle allows that certain actions that proceed from desires or emotions can count as *involuntary*:

many regard erotic desire (*erôs*) and certain cases of *thumos* and natural states (*ta phusika*) as being too strong for our nature; we pardon them as things capable of overpowering nature. A man would more seem to act from force and involuntarily if he acted to escape violent than if to escape gentle pain, and generally if to escape pain than to get pleasure. For that which depends on him – and all turns on this – is what his nature is able to bear; what it is not, what is not under the control of his natural *orexis* or reasoning, that does not depend on him. Therefore also those who are inspired and prophesy, though their act is one of thought, we still say do not have it in their own power either to say what they said, or to do what they did. And so of acts done through *epithumia*.⁸ So that some thoughts and passions do not depend on us, or acts that occur in accordance with such thoughts and reasonings, but, as Philolaus said, some arguments are too strong for us. (*EE* 2.8.1225a20–33)

These passages can be made consistent if we view the *NE* 3.1 passage as picking out ‘natural’ *orexeis* and take the *EE* 2.8 passage to be referring to ‘non-natural’ or ‘inhuman’ *orexeis* that are beyond what an agent’s nature ‘is able to bear’.⁹ But the relevant point for our current purposes is simply that the notion of desire in which it is true that all intentional actions are motivated by desires

⁸ I take it that Aristotle does not mean all appetites, just certain very strong or powerful ones.

⁹ At the beginning of the *EE* 2.8 passage, Aristotle somewhat confusingly refers to natural states (*ta phusika*) when he immediately goes on to say that the states in question overpower nature (though of course in one sense erotic desire is natural enough). It is at any rate at least clear that he recognises a sense in which the states in question can be said to overpower and go against nature. For the notion of ‘non-natural’ or ‘inhuman’ passions in play, see also *NE* 5.8.1136a5–9; and on this passage, and also for more detailed discussion of how the *NE* 3.1 and *EE* 2.8 texts are consistent, see Pearson (2006: §4).

is not an entirely uninteresting one, since the connection between that notion of desire and intentional action is itself interesting.

In fact (and now I come to the second point), I think that Aristotle would actually agree with Nagel and Scanlon that desires are not independent sources of motivation. As we considered in [Chapter 2](#), Aristotle claims that the ultimate source of motivation, what moves us 'first of all', is grasping the prospect of some object of desire through the capacity of thought or *phantasia* (*De an.* 3.10.433b10–12, cf. *De motu an.* 6.700b23–29). This means that, strictly speaking, it is the contents of certain cognitive states (belief, perceptual *phantasia*), when they reveal the prospect of objects of desire, that move us, not desires themselves. Thus, strictly speaking, we are not moved *by* desires, on Aristotle's account, but by the *prospect of objects of desire*.¹⁰ Aristotle's view is therefore actually *in line* with Nagel's ascription point: *whenever* someone is motivated, it becomes *ipso facto* appropriate to ascribe to him a desire to perform the act (i.e. the action is motivated *in accordance with* some desire), but, strictly speaking, it is what the agent saw as good about acting that way that was the source of his motivation, not the desire itself (i.e. the action is not motivated *by* a desire).

But if this is so, we shall want to ask *how* it can be so, given that Aristotle does indeed employ *orexis* in a very broad sense, and it was this that seemed to be at issue. Let me try to unravel this. In the passage I quoted at the start of the section, Scanlon seemed to allow that 'desire', when employed in the broad sense, *can* motivate us to act. He claimed that it is 'uncontroversial that desires in this broad sense are capable of moving us to act' and that it is 'plausible to claim that they are the only things capable of this, since anything that moves us (at least to intentional action) is likely to count as such a desire' (1998: 37). But Scanlon immediately continues:

But many elements of this class are what Nagel calls 'motivated desires'; that is to say, they do not seem to be *sources* of motivation but rather the motivational

¹⁰ Thus when Aristotle refers to acts that are due to (*dia*) or proceed from (*apo*) some desire in the *NE* 3.1 passage just quoted, he should probably be thought of as providing a loose third-person ascription (along the lines of: 'Trevor was driven by his desire to eat the third cream cake'), not as maintaining that desires literally serve as sources of motivation.

consequences of something else, such as the agent's recognition of something as a duty, or as supported by a reason of some other kind. (1998: 37)

Nagel (1970: 29) drew a distinction between two different kinds of desire: unmotivated desires, 'like the appetites and in certain cases the emotions', which 'simply come to us' or 'simply assail us'; and motivated desires, for example 'a desire to shop for groceries, after discovering nothing appetising in the refrigerator', which are arrived at 'by decision and after deliberation'.¹¹ Nagel claimed that if the desire is a motivated one, 'the explanation of it will be the same as the explanation of [the agent's] pursuit' (1970: 29). In this way, motivated desires will not serve as distinct *sources* of motivation; for although when someone acts intentionally it will *ipso facto* be appropriate to ascribe to him a desire to act that way, 'nothing follows about the role of desire as a condition contributing to the motivational efficacy of those considerations' (1970: 30). However, Nagel does appear to allow that *unmotivated* desires *can* serve as distinct sources of motivation, and seems content just to argue that it is improbable that an unmotivated desire lies behind each motivated one.

What is novel about Scanlon's approach is that he argues that Nagel's unmotivated desires, e.g. thirst and hunger, do not themselves serve as independent sources of motivation either; instead, they too involve taking certain features to count in favour of actions. If I am thirsty, for instance, the description of this, on Scanlon's account, involves three elements: (i) 'a present sensation (the dryness in my throat)', (ii) 'the belief that some action would lead to a pleasant state in the future', and (iii) 'my taking this future good to be a reason for so acting' (1998: 38). The dryness in my throat, and the fact that it will not disappear on its own, give me reason to *believe* that a drink of water in the near future will provide this particular pleasure, 'but', suggests Scanlon, 'the motivational work seems to be done by my taking this future pleasure to count in favour of drinking' (1998: 38). If Scanlon is right, it will be a general

¹¹ Schueler (1995: 15–28) provides some critical discussion of Nagel's distinction. See also Schiffer's (1976: 197–8) related distinction between 'reason-following' and 'reason-providing' desires. Nagel himself (1970: 29n.1) suggests that the category of motivated desires was already recognised by Aristotle (referring to *NE* 3.3).

point about motivation that it stems from perceived features of the situation, not from desires themselves (whether motivated or unmotivated).

But given that Scanlon ultimately holds that *no* desire serves as a source of motivation,¹² the *broadness* of the notion of desire (that Scanlon initially drew attention to) was actually a red herring. Even when 'desire' is taken to include both motivated and unmotivated states, on Scanlon's view, desires cannot be said to serve as independent sources of motivation. And since Aristotle also appears to hold *in general* (i.e. of orexis) that the source of motivation is the content of certain cognitive states (belief, perceptual phantasia), when these reveal the prospect of objects of desire, not desires themselves, his account matches Scanlon's in this respect. Indeed, in so far as Aristotle thinks that we can be motivated not merely by the contents of evaluative beliefs, but also by the contents of our evaluative perceptual phantasias, his view serves to qualify Scanlon's account in an important way. What is it about certain kinds of perceived features of a situation that enable them to motivate us? Scanlon suggests that they involve us taking certain considerations to count in favour of a course of action and that to see certain considerations as counting in favour of some action is to see that one has *reason* to perform that action. Thus, Scanlon suggests, 'we should not take "desires" to be a special source of motivation, independent of our seeing things as reasons' (1998: 40); rather, even with unmotivated desires, such as appetites, we should accept that the source of motivation is 'the agent's perception of some consideration as a reason, not some additional element of "desire"' (1998: 40–1). But perceived reasons, for Scanlon, are the contents of *beliefs* (1998: 56), so it seems that every desire, whether motivated or unmotivated, is ultimately belief-based, on his account. On Aristotle's view, by contrast, if reasons are the contents of

¹² Scanlon does acknowledge that there might be a few cases in which 'because I felt like it' could serve as a reason to do something, but he maintains that these are 'special, rather trivial cases, not central examples that provide the pattern on which all other cases of doing something for a reason should be modelled' (1998: 48). Dancy (2000: Ch. 2) attempts to argue, even in the light of such inclinations and urges, that desires are responses to perceived reasons.

(certain) beliefs, we cannot identify perceived reasons with the source of motivation. For one thing, this would mean that animals cannot have desires, whereas they palpably can. For another, it would miss out the whole category of human desires that are formed in response to perceptual phantasia (in contrast to belief-based attitudes). Thus, on Aristotle's account, it is more reasonable to say that it is *the prospect of objects of desire*, as these are revealed either by belief or by perceptual phantasia, that motivate us to act (see also below).¹³

2. Aristotle's narrow notion of desire and some current views

Now let me turn to Aristotle's narrow notion of desire. In the next section I shall provide some critical discussion of the specific way in which Aristotle divides up the *orekton*, but before I come to that, I shall first, in the present section, consider his account in a general way. In so doing, I shall contrast his basic understanding of narrow notions of desire with two contemporary ones: G. F. Schueler's and Thomas Scanlon's.

(a) *Schueler*

G. F. Schueler introduces his narrow notion of desire as follows:

To put it metaphorically, there is a fault line that cuts across uses of the term 'desire'. It is the one created when one asks oneself whether it is possible for someone to intentionally do something that he or she has *no* desire to do. In one sense of 'desire' this is simply not possible. This is the sense, marked by Nagel's entailment point, in which it follows, from the fact that an agent intentionally performed some action, that he or she wanted to do whatever it was that action was supposed to achieve. But in the other perfectly good sense of 'desire', there is nothing at all problematic or mysterious about people doing things they have no desire to do, things they don't *want* to do *at all*. I would say, for instance, that I had no desire to attend a meeting at my son's school the other evening. I would much rather have stayed home and read. But I did attend the meeting because I believed I had a responsibility to do so, a responsibility mostly to my son but partly to my community. In this sense of 'desire', it is perfectly possible to do things you have no desire to do, and to fail to

¹³ I have investigated the significance of this alteration in detail in my 2011a.

do things, such as staying at home and reading, that you do want to do. (Schueler 1995: 29, emphases in the original)

It is central to Schueler's narrow notion of desire that one can act in a way in which one has *no* desire to act at all. Aristotle, too, can allow that there are significations of 'desire' in which we can say that we act intentionally in a way in which we have no desire to act. We have seen that he divides orexis into three species: *epithumia*, *thumos* and *boulêsis*. These different kinds of orexis pick out different parts of the good, in the broad signification of 'good' in which orexis attaches to the good. And although in the broad signification of 'desire' we cannot act intentionally in a way in which we have no desire to act, we can act intentionally in a way in which we have no desire to act in any of Aristotle's narrow senses. For example, agents can frequently act intentionally in ways in which they have no *epithumia* to act (either because they simply do not have an *epithumia* for the action in question, or because they act against or in spite of an *epithumia* they possess, as with *enkratic* agents). Noel may intentionally go jogging even though this does not accord with his pleasure-based *epithumia*.

However, there is an important difference between Aristotle's and Schueler's accounts. Schueler claims that desires in the narrow sense, which he also calls 'desires-proper', include things such as 'cravings, urges, wishes, hopes, yens, and the like, as well as some motivated desires', but *not* such things 'as moral or political beliefs that could appear in practical deliberation as arguing against the dictates of one's urges, cravings, or wishes' (1995: 35). Suppose Alexander craves to eat some *foie gras* because of the taste, but has developed the belief that to do so is immoral. On Schueler's view, if Alexander acts on the craving, he acts in accordance with a desire in the narrow sense, a *desire-proper*. On the other hand, if Alexander acts in accordance with the moral belief, he can only be said to act in accordance with a desire in the broad sense in which it simply follows that all intentional actions are motivated in accordance with a desire. Aristotle's account differs. On his view, if an agent acts in accordance with his moral belief, he may be acting not only in accordance with a desire in the broad sense, but also in accordance with a desire in a narrow sense too. If Alexander acts in accordance with his moral belief,

and does not eat the *foie gras*, he may nonetheless act in accordance with a *boulêsis* (against his *epithumia*), not merely a desire in the broad sense.¹⁴

There is reason to think that Aristotle's account is preferable to Schueler's. To see this, note that there seems little reason to think that there could not be cases in which we would want to say that we desire to act in accordance with some moral or political belief, even though we in fact act intentionally on considerations pertaining to, for example, hunger, which we would avow we have no desire to follow. Consider Helen, a protester who is motivated to attend a G20 rally for perceived moral reasons. Suppose, in the middle of the afternoon, Helen suddenly realises she has not eaten all day. She might say to herself: 'I want to continue protesting – this is what I really want to do – but I realise that if I don't get something to eat, I'm going to feel rather ill. So I'll do what I really don't want to do: break from protesting, and go to get something to eat.' If we adopted Schueler's analysis, it seems that we should say that Helen is just mistaken and in fact does not have a desire-proper to act in accordance with her moral belief, but only possesses a desire-proper to get something to eat. But that seems wrong: if we had to categorise one of Helen's desires as a desire-proper, it would be the desire to act in accordance with her moral belief; whereas the desire to eat something seems merely ascribable in virtue of the fact that if Helen follows her reasoning, her action would be intentional. The problem occurs because Schueler singles out a certain sort of content (pertaining to moral and political beliefs) that, if it motivates us, entails that we *never* count as being motivated in accordance with a desire-proper. Aristotle's account, by contrast, does not have this feature and so avoids the problem: he can allow that Helen has a desire-proper to act in accordance with her moral belief, namely, a *boulêsis*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Indeed, if Aristotle holds that one cannot possess a desire in the broad sense *without* having some desire in one of the narrow senses, as *EE* 2.10.1225b24–26 (quoted below) suggests, then it would be the case that if an agent acts in accordance with a desire in the broad sense, he *must* also act in accordance with a desire in one of the narrow senses.

¹⁵ Aristotle would also say that we have a desire-proper to act in accordance with the desire to get something to eat. Interestingly, since neither of these desires-proper is

(b) Scanlon

Scanlon also develops a narrow notion of desire. From consideration of such cases as thirst (see p. 210), he specifies what he calls 'desire in the directed-attention sense'. On this notion:

A person has a desire in the directed-attention sense that P if the thought of P keeps occurring to him or her in a favourable light, that is to say, if the person's attention is directed insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favour of P. (1998: 39)

Like Schueler's and Aristotle's narrow notions of desire, Scanlon's account allows us to say that we can act intentionally in ways in which we have no desire to act:

Desires for food, for example, and sexual desires are marked by just this character of directed attention. And this character is generally missing in cases in which we say that a person who does something for a reason nonetheless 'has no desire to do it', as when, for example, one must tell a friend some unwelcome news. (1998: 39)

But Scanlon's account is novel in so far as it leaves open the possible objects of a desire in his narrow sense. He notes that although the notion of desire in the directed-attention sense obviously fits well with desires for food and other appetites such as sexual desire, it is not restricted to such goals:

People can 'have a great desire' in the directed-attention sense to succeed in some endeavour, to achieve fame (even posthumous fame), to provide for their children after their death, or even in the case of some compulsive, to wash their hands. Since the definition I have given leaves the possible objects of a 'desire in the directed-attention sense' entirely open, it is just as appropriate on this account to say that someone with a very active conscience 'has a strong desire to do the right thing' as it is to say of a person who is utterly unscrupulous that he 'has a strong desire for personal gain.' (1998: 39)

This means that Scanlon's account can also deal with the example that proved problematic for Schueler: since Scanlon's notion of desire in the directed-attention sense leaves open the possible objects of desire in his narrow sense, he can say that Helen has a desire in this sense to continue with the protest.

pleasure-based, Aristotle would probably describe the case as one in which Helen possesses two conflicting *boulêseis* (cf. *Metaph.* Θ.5.1048a21–22): one directed at remaining active in the protest (in order to support the moral cause), and a contrary one directed at breaking from the protest (in order to get something to eat on grounds of health).

However, in tying the narrow notion of desire so closely to conscious attention, not narrower parts of the broad notion of good or value, Scanlon perhaps gives up too quickly on the idea of capturing the moral psychology of an agent in terms of desire. Of course, Scanlon would *like* us to give up on such an idea. Concerning *akrasia*, he claims:

Even when desire in the directed-attention sense runs contrary to our reason (that is to say, our judgment) ... it remains true that the motivational force of these states lies in a tendency to see some consideration as a *reason*. Akratic actions ... are cases in which a person's rational capacities have malfunctioned, not cases in which these capacities are overmastered by something else, called desire. (1998: 40)

Given our remarks in §1, it seems likely that Aristotle would ultimately agree that akratic actions are not cases in which one's rational capacities are overmastered by desire; if, that is, we mean by this that akratic actions involve us being motivated *by* a desire to act against our rational capacities. This would be mistaken, on Aristotle's view, because ultimately it is not desires that motivate us, but objects of desire. However, on Aristotle's account, this does not entail that all cases of *akrasia* are instances in which the motivational force of our action stems from our taking certain considerations to count as reasons, and so does not entail that all cases of *akrasia* are ultimately cases in which our rational capacities have simply malfunctioned. This is because, as we noted towards the end of §1, Aristotle thinks that objects of desire are not simply specifiable in terms of perceived reasons – if perceived reasons are identified as the contents of certain beliefs – since objects of desire are revealed in contents grasped by perceptual *phantasia* as well as by belief, and the former are distinct from the latter. If Aristotle is right on this point, and right, too, to think that we (and not just non-rational animals) can have such desires, then cases of *akrasia* might occur in which an agent is overcome by an object of desire even though that desire does not involve taking certain considerations as reasons. Contra Scanlon's analysis, then, such cases of *akrasia* would not collapse into a simple rational malfunction since it is not true that both sides of the motivational conflict involve a tendency to see some consideration as a reason. Instead, the cases in question would be ones in which the agent's judgement

is overcome by some object of desire grasped not by belief, but by perceptual phantasia.

Given this, it may seem more appropriate to say that the source of motivation is the prospect of some object of desire, since this is what groups the various motivational sources. But then an account of moral psychology in terms of particular kinds of desire seems very much on the cards. For although one is not motivated *by* desires, even in the narrow sense of desire, one can still be said to be motivated *in accordance with* desires, not just in the broad sense, but in any of the narrow senses as well. Thus, although the akratic agent's rational capacities are not 'overmastered by something else called desire', on Aristotle's account, the akratic agent *does* act against his rational capacities *in accordance with* some desire he possesses.

Various combinations of Aristotle's particular kinds of desires in an agent will generate a basic moral psychology. An agent can have an epithumia or thumos in conflict with his boulêsis, and (a) intentionally act in accordance with his epithumia or thumos against his boulêsis – as with Aristotle's akratic agent; or (b) intentionally act in accordance with his boulêsis against his epithumia or thumos – as with Aristotle's enkratic agent; or else he might have his boulêsis and epithumia/thumos pointing in the same direction – as with virtuous agents. In each case, the account can remain entirely open as to whether or not the desires in question would be characterised (by Scanlon) as desires in the directed-attention sense.¹⁶ This is because Aristotle's account of narrow notions of desire is object-based (epithumia is pleasure-based, thumos retaliation-based, and boulêsis is good-based in a narrower sense of 'good' than that in which all orexeis are good-based, reflecting considerations of health, honour, etc.), not concerned with the state of our attention.

¹⁶ What we avow we 'really want' might often line up with our epithumiai, since such avowals might well frequently reflect what we would find pleasurable. But this need not always be the case: Trevor might insist that what he 'really wants' is to resist eating the third piece of cake, even though he has a desire in the directed-attention sense to eat it. On Scanlon's view, when we act *against* what we have a desire-proper to do, we presumably only act in accordance with a desire in the broad sense, the notion of 'desire' that is merely ascribable owing to the fact that the action was intentional. But we might want to say that when we act in such a way we also act on a desire in a narrow sense, not merely the ascribed sense.

When the akratic agent acts, he acts not only against some manifestation of his rational capacities, but also, in so doing, against the desire-proper (a *boulêsis*) embodied in those rationalisations. And, in so acting, he can be truly said to act voluntarily in a way in which he had no desire to act; so long as, that is, 'desire' picks out the *boulêsis* that he thinks he should have followed. Hence, contrary to Scanlon, at least some akratic actions can sensibly be characterised in terms of desires, even when we accept that it is ultimately not desires, but instead their objects, that motivate us to act. Note, too, that in order to account for *enkratic* actions, it would seem that even Scanlon would have to appeal to desire. From the perspective of perceived reasons, the *enkratic* agent acts in the way he thinks he has most reason to do. But then, since his rational capacities do not malfunction, he seems to be just like the virtuous agent in this respect. The only way that Scanlon can mark him out, it seems, is by maintaining that he has a desire in the directed-attention sense to act in a way that he judges he should not, even though he nonetheless acts as he judges he should.

3. Tensions in Aristotle's taxonomy of desires

So far in this chapter, I have attempted to show that Aristotle's broad and narrow notions of desire are not unpromising and, indeed, are worthy of further consideration. But it would be one-sided of me to pretend that all is plain sailing. Aristotle's specific way of dividing up the *orekton* is, I think, questionable, and it is unclear to me that the division would be palatable without substantial revision. Such a reconstruction is beyond the scope of this book, but let me close this chapter by highlighting two dimensions of Aristotle's tripartite division of *orexis* that suggest revision may be required.

(a) *Unequal evaluative spheres*

The first issue concerns whether the evaluative spheres that correspond to Aristotle's three kinds of desire are of equivalent significance and, if not, what reason Aristotle has for sticking with

just these three spheres, rather than positing others in addition, or, indeed, collapsing one of them into one of the others.

Consider *thumos*. In [Chapter 5](#) we noted that Aristotle generally thinks that *thumos* is a desire for retaliation owing to a perceived slight. But even though Aristotle seems to provide broad construals of 'slight' and 'retaliation', and even allowing for the fact, in addition, that *thumos* may have been much more significant for ancient Greeks than it is for us, this desire might still seem rather narrow in focus to count as a species of *orexis* worth singling out in its own right.¹⁷ One might respond to this by noting that *epithumia* can also be considered to be quite narrow, at least on the narrow construal of this desire that ties it to certain sorts of bodily pleasure. But this does not really solve the problem. For besides the fact that the status of the broad notion of *epithumia* would then be left unclear, it would leave us with the problem that now *boulêsis* stands out as being significantly broader than Aristotle's other kinds of desire: *epithumia* would be for certain kinds of bodily pleasure, *thumos* for retaliation, but *boulêsis* would be for a whole range of ends, such as honour, health, etc. Now, those who think that Aristotle ties *boulêsis* to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia* might at this point suggest that their account can provide a solution here. For, given that account, it will then transpire that *all three* of Aristotle's desires are for equivalently narrow spheres: certain kinds of bodily pleasure, retaliation, and the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*. The problem with this is twofold: (i) if my argument in [Chapter 6](#) is correct, in connecting *boulêsis* to the good Aristotle does not mean to connect it to the agent's conception of *eudaimonia*; (ii) the cost of making Aristotle's evaluative spheres equivalently *narrow* is rank implausibility with respect to the second issue I shall shortly highlight; namely, concerning whether or not these

¹⁷ Indeed, at some points Aristotle seems himself to leave it behind somewhat. Most interestingly, in *Rh.* 1.10, having acknowledged *thumos* as a distinct kind of *orexis* (1369a7), he 'sums up' at the end of the chapter by stating that all actions that are due to ourselves either are or seem to be good or pleasant (1369a18–20). (Aristotle could be intending to over-generalise at this point, since he has noted (1369b14–15) that he will be clearer about anger when he considers the emotions later on (in Book 2), but perhaps he is implicitly acknowledging in this reduction that the object of *thumos* is not really at the same level as the objects of his other desires.)

evaluative spheres plausibly encompass every desirable end. The narrower the ends of Aristotle's three desires are taken to be, the more implausible it becomes to think that they will capture all objects of desire.

At this point, one might ask: why does it *matter* if the evaluative spheres corresponding to Aristotle's three desires are of different (evaluative) dimensions? It matters because in principle we could carve up the *orekton* in any number of ways, reflecting any number of criteria or concerns we might consider important or relevant. In order for Aristotle's specific division to be acceptable, we need to be convinced that his evaluative spheres (i) plausibly cut the *orekton* up without leaving any gaps and (ii) serve to pick out equally fundamental (core) evaluative spheres. I shall consider (i) in §3(b) below, but it is (ii) that concerns me now. If we *give up* on (ii), what is to prevent someone from proposing that we recognise desires to fly to the moon as a distinct category of desire, on a par with Aristotle's three categories? What prevents it, of course, is the presumption that the evaluative spheres corresponding to the species of desire that we pick out are equivalently substantial parts of the *orekton*, or at least equivalently *significant* parts of it. Without that presumption, moon-flying desires might well pick out a distinct category.

But then *thumos* does stick out somewhat. For we can perhaps understand why Aristotle might sometimes focus on a narrow notion of *epithumia*, given that such desires are predominant in animals, and fundamental to one of his core virtues (temperance), while nonetheless *presuming* that, ultimately, it is the broad notion that he actually wants (and needs) to employ. But, as we saw in [Chapter 5](#), whereas he appears to have had access to a broader notion of *thumos* (in Plato), he seems very keen to tie this desire specifically to anger (*orgê*), even when the context might initially invite a broader construal. But anger, on Aristotle's account, although no doubt more important to him than to us (he makes a virtue out of it in *NE* 4.5 and *EE* 3.3) is just one emotional state, and Aristotle, perhaps more so than anyone else before him, is acutely aware of the variety of emotional states there are. He repeatedly provides lists of emotions that cover a

wide range of states,¹⁸ and in *Rh.* 2 he mentions around *seventeen* such states in the process of developing detailed accounts of a large number of them.¹⁹ Now it may be that Aristotle would maintain that some of the desires that might stem from other emotional states besides anger could be classified as one of his other two species of desire (see below). But, in the current context, this would only exacerbate the problem: for it would only serve to make thumos appear *even narrower* than it already does in comparison with Aristotle's other two kinds of desire. Hence one wants to know why he insists on placing it alongside those desires, as if we have some holy triumvirate of core motivational states.²⁰ More on a par with thumos, it seems, would be *subdivisions* of boulêsis and epithumia (on the broad construal of the latter, at least); for example, a boulêsis for health in contrast to a boulêsis for honour.

(b) *Gaps in the orekton*

Thus far we have assumed that Aristotle intends the orekton to be neatly divided, without gaps, into the evaluative spheres that correspond to his three species of desire. But how do we know that he did not hold that although epithumia, thumos and boulêsis are kinds of orexis, there can be *other* kinds as well? The evidence is not just that he consistently works with this triadic scheme,²¹ but also that he explicitly asserts the point. In *EE* 2.10, in distinguishing choice from orexis, he claims:

That [choice] is not orexis is clear; for then it would be either boulêsis, or epithumia, or thumos; for no one desires (*oregetai*) anything without undergoing one of these. (1225b24–26)

¹⁸ See e.g. *NE* 2.5.1105b21–23, 2.6.1106b18–19, *EE* 2.2.1220b12–14, *De an.* 1.1.403a17–18, *Rh.* 2.1.1378a20–21.

¹⁹ Seventeen is the most generous count (see Dow (2011: §1)), but in any event a very large number.

²⁰ One again thinks of Plato at this point, but note that merely pointing to the Platonic 'baggage' does not get Aristotle off the hook: he is more than prepared to emend Plato's account when he sees fit, as with insisting on the narrow notion of thumos, and even to be innovative, as with the introduction of 'orexis', discussed in [Chapter 1](#).

²¹ See e.g. *De an.* 2.3.414b2, *De motu an.* 6.700b22, 7.701a36–701b1, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a1–7, *EE* 2.7.1223a26–27, 2.10.1225b24–26.

According to this passage, Aristotle thinks not just that there is a broad notion of desire, orexis, and three narrow notions, epithumia, thumos, and boulêsis, he also thinks that each case of desiring in the broad sense is a case of desiring in one of the three narrow senses as well. If this is Aristotle's view, he would think that for any orexis we choose it must be possible to assign that orexis to one of the three kinds. But is that plausible?

With this question in mind, we can see why it is important for Aristotle to adopt broad specifications of his three kinds of desire. If, for example, we work with the narrow notion of epithumia, then we should want to know what desires for other bodily pleasures, besides those connected, whether directly or indirectly, to tactile pleasures that arise from ameliorating painful disruptive bodily states, would be for Aristotle? Are they meant to be boulêseis or thumoi?²² If so, how would that affect our understanding of those desires? If, by contrast, Aristotle works with the broad notion of epithumia, he need not provide answers to these questions, and his account will at least provide two very general classes of desire: pleasure-based epithumia and good-based boulêsis (the latter, as we saw in [Chapter 6](#), ranging over a variety of 'goods'). But then the question is whether thumos can sensibly 'mop up', so to speak, the remaining evaluative space.

Thumos, we have noted, seems primarily, on Aristotle's view, to represent a specific emotional state, namely, anger (orgê). But this naturally invites us to consider how he would characterise desires that stem from other emotions. We have noted that Aristotle sometimes includes epithumia, not just thumos/orgê, on his lists of emotions.²³ Furthermore the emotion of 'friendly feeling' (*to philein*), in *Rh.* 2.4, seems to involve some kind of boulêsis.²⁴ In addition,

²² Pleasure can be taken up as an object of boulêsis, as e.g. when one makes pleasure one's good (see e.g. *NE* 3.4; and also [Chapter 3](#), §3(b), and [Chapter 6](#), §4, p. 165, above), but here it would have to be envisaged as an object of boulêsis in its own right, i.e. simply in so far as it is pleasant, which might seem difficult to square with Aristotle's claim that boulêsis and epithumia are contrasted by the fact that the former is orexis for the good, the latter is orexis for the pleasant (see [Chapter 3](#), §2).

²³ [Chapter 5](#), §1: see *NE* 2.5.1105b21–23, *Rh.* 2.1.1378a20–21, *EE* 2.2.1220b12–14; cf. *NE* 3.1.1111b1–2.

²⁴ 'Let *being friendly* be [defined as] having boulêseis (*boulesthai*) for someone to have what one thinks are good things for him, not what one thinks benefits oneself, and [having boulêseis for] what is potentially productive of these good things' (*Rh.* 2.4.1380b36–1381a1, translation after Kennedy (1991)).

perhaps some of the desires that one might naturally form in response to emotional states could also sensibly be characterised as one of Aristotle's species of desire.²⁵ A desire to help someone because one pities him or her (where 'pity' (*eleos*) involves distress at imagining someone to have undergone some underserved destructive or painful evil (*Rh.* 2.8.1385b13–14)) might perhaps be some kind of *boulêsis*. As might a desire to get certain good things, formed in response to 'emulation' (*zêlos*).²⁶

But it does not seem likely that all the desires that stem from emotional states are always going to be specifiable as one of Aristotle's three species. To take just one example, consider fear. Fear is a basic emotional state, and is an emotion that we share with non-rational animals (see e.g. *NE* 3.8.1116b31–33). If a non-rational animal forms a desire to get away from something owing to fear, that motivation clearly could not count as either a *boulêsis* or a *thumos*, since non-rational creatures are unable to possess rational desires and *thumos*, on Aristotle's view, is a desire for retaliation owing to a perceived slight. Could it, then, be sensibly characterised as an *epithumia*? This seems unlikely, even given the broad notion of *epithumia*. For although getting away from the fearful object might well be pleasant or satisfying, it will generally seem odd to say that pleasure is the goal or end of one's desire. There is a distinction between being motivated by a prospect (that one finds pleasurable) and being motivated by a pleasurable prospect.²⁷ If we had to identify a positive end that

²⁵ In general Aristotle's accounts of individual emotions in *Rh.* 2 are distress- or pain-based, not desire-based; see Striker (1996: 291) and Dow (2011).

²⁶ 'Emulation is [defined as] a kind of distress at the apparent presence, among others like him by nature, of things honoured and possible for a person to acquire, [with the distress arising] not from the fact that another has them but that the emulator does not' (*Rh.* 2.11.1388a32–35, transl. after Kennedy (1991)). Contrast Aristotle's notion of 'envy' (*phthonos*): 'a certain kind of distress at apparent success on the part of one's peers in attaining good things ... not that a person may get anything for himself but because of those who have it' (*Rh.* 2.10.1387b23–25, transl. after Kennedy (1991)).

²⁷ Cf. the motive of *pleonexia*, which Aristotle claims is 'concerned with honour or money or safety – or that which includes these, if we had a single name for it – and its motive is the pleasure which arises from gain' (*di' hêdonên tèn apo tou kerdous*) (*NE* 5.2.1130b1–3). Does this count as some kind of *epithumia*? If the motive is *the-pleasure-of-gain*, then there seems no obstacle to including it as an *epithumia* (in the broad sense). If the motive is simply *gain* (the prospect of which is pleasurable), then the desire cannot be an *epithumia* (although it could be a *boulêsis*). (Relatedly, note that we can have both a *boulêsis* and an *epithumia* (on the broad notion) for *health* (see *NE* 3.3.1111b27 and *NE*

the desire was directed at, it would presumably be *safety*, not *the pleasure of safety*, even though the prospect of safety might well be pleasant.²⁸ Thus, even with Aristotle's broad notion of *epithumia*, *thumos* fails to pick up all the other non-rational motivations he seems compelled to recognise. And it is perhaps worth noting that this is not simply a function of the fact that Aristotle employs a notion of *thumos* tied to a desire to seek revenge in response to a perceived slight. For even a broader notion of *thumos*, which (say) incorporates 'spirited' impulses more generally, would not plausibly stretch as far as desires to *flee* from something fearful, on any signification of the Greek word (see Chapter 5, §2). But if there can be parts of the *orekton* that are not picked up by any of Aristotle's three desires, this does not sit well with the claim in *EE* 2.10, quoted above, that any desire (*orexis*) we can identify must be either an *epithumia* or a *thumos* or a *boulêsis*. In one way or another, then, Aristotle's account seems to need revision.

Let me add one final observation in this general vicinity. My criticisms have concerned Aristotle's tripartite division of *orexis* into *epithumia*, *thumos* and *boulêsis*. But it may be that if one instead focused on Aristotle's *bipartite* division of desires, into rational and non-rational, the account might have greater plausibility with respect to the issues I have highlighted in this section. For, as we saw in the last chapter, a desire counts as 'rational', on Aristotle's view, if it aims at a basic or core end that requires one to be a rational creature, and a desire counts as 'non-rational' if it aims at a basic end that non-rational creatures can also aim for. But, so characterised, the space of the *orekton* would seem to be exhausted

3.1.1111a31). These desires are distinct, on my view, because the latter is always to be understood, strictly speaking, as a desire for *the pleasure of health*, whereas the former is just for health itself (as a good thing).)

²⁸ Or, in so far as such a desire can be considered pleasure-based, Aristotle would seem to have a problem distinguishing *thumos* itself from the broad notion of *epithumia*, since he claims that *thumos* 'is not without a certain pleasure, involving as it does the hope of revenge' (*EE* 3.1.1229b31–32; see also *Rh.* 2.2.1378b1–2, *Rh.* 1.11.1370b30–32). More plausibly, both would be considered concomitant, not focal, ends. In general, such a distinction seems required: although one may enjoy helping people one pities, we can distinguish between those who do this purely for the pleasure they get from doing so (perhaps conceitedly), and those who help for the good they see they can do, even if it can prove painful for them on occasion. It may in some cases be more natural to think of a certain desiderative response to an emotion as an aversion (*phugê*): *to get away from* the feared object, *to escape* the frightening event, for the trauma *to be over*, etc.

by rational and non-rational desires (solving my second problem), and the evaluative spheres corresponding to these desires would seem to be equivalently relevant or significant ones to recognise (solving my first problem).

However, as we have seen, Aristotle's two ways of dividing up the *orekton* are not independent of one another: he thinks that *boulêsis* is rational and *epithumia* and *thumos* are non-rational. This means that on his view the ends of rational desires are exhausted by *boulêsis*, and the ends of non-rational desires are exhausted by the combined ends of *epithumia* and *thumos*. And that, I have argued, is problematic. Hence the idea that Aristotle's bipartite division fares better than his tripartite division (at least with respect to my two problems) hinges on our not tying the former to the latter. But to make that move is to begin to *revise* Aristotle's account. And proper consideration of the best way to approach that issue, I have said, will have to wait for another day.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided some further reflections about Aristotle's broad and narrow notions of desire. I first considered the charge that Aristotle's broad notion of desire is so broad that it is trivial or insubstantial. I argued that even though it extends beyond action-prompting desires to hopes and wishes, it nonetheless serves to distinguish *orexis* from a variety of other psychological states. The charge of triviality is often directed specifically at the notion that every action is motivated by a desire. But such a notion of desire does at least serve to distinguish intentional from unintentional action, and, in any event, Aristotle ultimately does not think that the source of motivation is desire, but instead *the prospect of objects of desire*. This actually brings his position in line with certain non-Humeans, such as Nagel and Scanlon (although Aristotle's view that such prospects can be grasped not just by belief but also by perceptual *phantasia* provides an important challenge to their accounts, albeit within a non-Humean framework). In §2 I turned to consider his general account of narrow notions of desire. I suggested that his basic picture of such desires

is interesting and worth considering in further detail, improving as it does on both Schueler's and Scanlon's accounts of such desires. However, in §3, I explained how, at a less abstract level, there are nonetheless certain problematic dimensions to Aristotle's specific tripartite division of orexis. These ultimately suggest that the particular way he divides up the orekton would need revision in order to be entirely palatable.

CHAPTER 9

ARISTOTLE'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

In this final chapter of the book I consider some aspects of Aristotle's moral psychology. In [Chapter 4](#) we noted that Aristotle thinks that the *epithumiai* of the temperate agent harmonise with reason. In [Chapter 5](#) we saw that he appears to believe that *thumos* may 'aid' the courageous agent to act virtuously. And in [Chapter 6](#) we found that he holds that the *boulêseis* of the virtuous agent, or at least those that are bound up with his choices, will also standardly align with his good character. Overall, the discussion has suggested the following picture of Aristotle's account of virtue: the virtuous agent experiences the harmonious interplay of his rational and non-rational parts. In contrast to *akratic* and *enkratic* agents, his rational and non-rational motivations point in the same direction. But is this actually Aristotle's view? Is the virtuous agent *entirely* unconflicted? If so, what mechanism could explain such a feature of his psychological makeup? If not, how can we distinguish virtuous agents from *enkratic* agents? In this chapter I address these and related questions, focusing on the key virtues of courage and temperance. In developing my account, I provide detailed discussion of two rival readings of Aristotle's account of virtue: John McDowell's and David Charles'.¹

1. The relation between evaluative cognitions and motivation

Let me start by considering the relation between two different kinds of evaluative cognition and the motivations that naturally

¹ I focus on these authors' accounts because I find them particularly relevant for the questions I am concerned with, and thus helpful as a foil for developing my own reading. Of course, there are a number of other important discussions of Aristotle's account of virtue.

follow from them. As we have seen, temperance is concerned with certain kinds of bodily pleasure, and courage is concerned with fear (see [Chapter 4](#), §3, and [Chapter 5](#), §2(b), respectively). So let us consider the relation between cognising that some action would provide one with bodily pleasure and being motivated to perform that action, on the one hand, and cognising that some action would be extremely dangerous to perform and being motivated *not* to perform it, on the other.²

It is plausible to think that either of these cognitions would entail its corresponding motivation, at least in the absence of any additional feature that may block the connection. If I cognise that it would be pleasurable for me to eat a cream cake that sits on the table at the other side of the room, that cognition would, in the absence of any feature that may prevent it, entail that I am motivated to eat the cream cake. If I cognise that it would be extremely dangerous to dangle myself from the Clifton Suspension Bridge, that cognition would, in the absence of any feature that may prevent it, entail that I am motivated not to dangle myself from the Clifton Suspension Bridge.³

The addition of the concessive clause I employed, ‘in the absence of some additional feature that may prevent it’, seems to be required, however, since it seems possible that certain aspects of a situation might prevent one from being motivated in accordance with the cognition. I might feel so tired or lazy that although I think it would be pleasurable to eat the cream cake this fails (for the time being at least) to motivate me to get it from the table at the other side of the room. And I might be so intent on drawing attention to myself or showing off that the judgement that it would be extremely dangerous to dangle myself from the Clifton Suspension Bridge fails to prevent me from being motivated to lower myself from it.

² By ‘cognition’, here, I mean, in Aristotelian terms, thought or phantasia (or incidental perception, if we read the link of perception to the present in the *de re* sense I specified in [Chapter 2](#), §4). See [Chapter 2](#), §3, above.

³ Obviously, so described, this action could not count as courageous, on Aristotle’s account, since courage primarily concerns situations that require one to risk one’s life in battle (*NE* 3.6.1115a32–35) or at least for a noble end (1115b4–6), but the example can serve for expository purposes.

It might be thought that the addition of the concessive clause makes the claim that such evaluative cognitions entail their corresponding motivations a trivial conceptual truth. 'Of course evaluative cognitions will entail their corresponding motivations in the absence of any feature that would prevent them from entailing the corresponding motivation!' one might say.⁴ But in fact there is a substantial point being made. For it seems likely that the fact that evaluative cognitions entail motivations in the absence of other additional features that prevent them from doing so is a truth of psychology, not a conceptual truth.⁵ That claim would only be a conceptual truth if it were somehow built into the concept of such evaluative cognitions that they entail their corresponding motivations (I shall consider one such view below). But note that *even if it were* built into the concept of such evaluative cognitions that they entail their corresponding motivations, it would not follow that the claim that evaluative cognitions entail their corresponding motivations in the absence of other additional features that prevent them from doing so is a *trivial* conceptual truth: for it is not the case that a failure to recognise that claim as true demonstrates a failure to grasp the sense of the claim and so, even if the claim turns out to be a conceptual truth, it would be a *non-trivial* conceptual truth.⁶

That it is nonetheless true that evaluative cognitions entail motivations in the absence of some other additional feature that prevents them from doing so can be seen from the fact that if we are told that an agent cognised that eating a cream cake would be pleasurable but that this cognition *did not* motivate him to eat it, or

⁴ Cf. Miller's (2003: 220–1) objection to Smith's (1994: 60–3) characterisation of motivational internalism.

⁵ The claim is not that *when* evaluative cognitions entail motivations they do so in the absence of features that would have prevented the evaluative cognition from entailing the motivation, which would be a trivial conceptual truth.

⁶ For this notion of trivial truth, and the point that trivial truth is a much stronger notion than analyticity, see e.g. Dummett (1992: 288–90). It at least *seems* conceptually possible that agents could construe some action as prospectively pleasurable and yet not be motivated to do it, or construe some action as prospectively dangerous and yet still be motivated to do it, *even* in the absence of any block that prevents them from doing so. We could imagine a possible world in which such evaluative cognitions and their corresponding motivations were not connected up in the way they are in our world. In such a world, although there is nothing blocking the cognition causing the motivation, it would not do so.

if we discovered that an agent viewed dangling himself from the Clifton Suspension Bridge as extremely dangerous and yet that such a cognition *failed* to motivate him *not* to so dangle himself, then we think that *there must be some additional explanation* as to why those cognitions did not motivate the agents accordingly. Again, if we imagine a scenario in which *two* agents form one of these cognitions (i.e. the very same cognition), and yet one of the agents is motivated in accordance with it but the other is not, we assume that *there must be some relevant difference between the agents* that accounts for their difference in motivation.⁷ But the additional explanation seems required in the first case and the relevant difference needs to be presumed in the second case *not* (it seems to me) because it is *built into the concept* of those evaluative cognitions that they entail their corresponding motivations, but because *as a matter of psychology* these evaluative cognitions entail their corresponding motivations in the absence of some additional feature that blocks the entailment.

I see no reason to doubt that Aristotle holds that such evaluative cognitions entail corresponding motivations in the absence of some additional feature that prevents them from doing so. However, one commentator seems to think that Aristotle has a rather special reason for holding that evaluative cognitions entail corresponding motivations. In an article I mentioned near the beginning of the last chapter (§1(a)), David Charles claims that Aristotle thinks not only that being pleasurably affected by A is another way of describing desiring A, but also that *perceiving A as pleasant* is another way of describing desiring A (2006: 21).⁸ Now, as I mentioned in the last chapter, the only way it could be remotely plausible to think that ‘being pleasurably affected by A’ is another way of describing

⁷ Or else, if there is not, we would prefer to doubt the legitimacy of ascribing the same cognition to both of the agents than to give up the notion that evaluative cognitions entail motivations in the absence of other additional features that prevent them doing so. Some have argued that the existence of the amoralist may be a counter-example to a moral version of judgement-internalism; see especially Brink (1997). For another account of judgement-internalism that, like mine above, aims to side-step issues pertaining specifically to *moral* judgements, see Wedgwood (2007: 23–34).

⁸ As mentioned in the last chapter, Charles gets the account from his reading of a passage in *De an.* 3.7 (431a8–17). That passage is extremely dense and opaque, and a proper discussion of it is impossible here (I hope to provide one on another occasion). I do not read it as asserting the point discussed.

'desiring A' is if by 'being pleasurably affected by A' we mean: 'being pleasurably affected by *the prospect of A*'. The same point applies to the equation of desiring A with perceiving A as pleasant. In order for it to be remotely plausible to think that 'perceiving A as pleasant' is just another way of describing 'desiring A', 'perceiving A as pleasant' would have to be short for 'perceiving A as *prospectively* pleasant'. For, just as desiring to drink Château Lafite Rothschild while picnicking on the lawns of Buckingham Palace is distinct from being pleasurably affected by drinking Château Lafite Rothschild while picnicking on the lawns of Buckingham Palace, so too desiring to drink Château Lafite Rothschild while picnicking on the lawns of Buckingham Palace is distinct from perceiving drinking Château Lafite Rothschild while picnicking on the lawns of Buckingham Palace as pleasant. So the proposal must be that Aristotle thinks that 'perceiving A as prospectively pleasant' is just another way of describing 'desiring A'. But if Aristotle does hold that perceiving A as prospectively pleasant is just another way of describing desiring A, he would have rather a special reason for thinking that evaluative cognitions entail corresponding motivations. On this view, Aristotle would hold that if I cognise that it would be pleasurable to eat the cream cake that sits on the table at the other side of the room, that would entail that I am motivated to eat the cream cake because the cognition and the motivation are just two ways of describing the same activity.⁹

However, I doubt that Aristotle holds this view. Applied to fear,¹⁰ it would suggest that there is just one activity that essentially involves construing the thing in question as dangerous and being averse to it. But Aristotle's definition of fear, in *Rh.*, does not include a desiderative component.¹¹ He defines it as 'a distress

⁹ Note that this view would hold that the concessive clause 'in the absence of any additional feature that may prevent it' applies not to the fact of motivation itself (which must exist if the cognition does), but to whether or not the agent was motivated *all-out*: even if to perceive that the cream cake would be pleasant to eat is just another way of describing desiring it, and so entails some degree of motivation, I might still not be motivated *all-out* to eat the pork pie (because e.g. I am feeling too tired or lazy).

¹⁰ Charles applies the account both to perceiving A as pleasant and to perceiving A as painful (2006: 21), but does not explicitly consider the implications for fear.

¹¹ Nor in general do Aristotle's accounts of emotions in *Rh.* – as we noted in the last chapter (see §3(b) and n.25). (The exceptions are *orgê* (as we saw in Chapter 5), and the friendly feeling emotion (*to philein*) Aristotle discusses in *Rh.* 2.4.)

or disturbance (*lupê ê tarachê*) caused by the phantasia of some destructive or painful evil in the future' (*Rh.* 2.5.1382a21–22).¹² But if a desire is not part of the essential specification of fear, this suggests that it would be conceptually possible, even in the absence of some blocking feature, to construe some prospect as destructive or painful, but not be motivated to avoid it.¹³ If that is conceptually possible (and the account of fear is generalised), Aristotle would presumably instead hold that evaluative cognitions entail corresponding motivations as a matter of psychology.

2. Two rival readings of Aristotle's account of virtue: John McDowell's and David Charles'

Given that Aristotle holds that certain kinds of evaluative cognition entail their corresponding motivations in the absence of some additional feature that prevents them from doing so, we can now consider how the considerations I have provided so far set up a discussion of Aristotle's account of virtue. For the question I now wish to address, with respect to Aristotle, is whether (and if so, how) the recognition that acting *virtuously* requires one to act in a specific way in a certain situation, can serve, in some agents at least, as a relevant kind of additional feature that would *prevent* such evaluative cognitions from engaging their corresponding motivations. Now, in fact, a number of commentators have come to sharply contrasting views as to how Aristotle answers this question, and it will significantly aid the subsequent development of my own answer to consider two such rival interpretations: John McDowell's and David Charles'. As mentioned in the introduction, I shall focus on the virtues of courage and temperance.

¹² Likewise the account Aristotle claims in *NE* 3.6 that some people employ, viz. 'expectation of evil' (1115a9).

¹³ Fear might essentially involve a desire in the minimal sense that corresponds to hopes (see Chapter 8, §1(a), above and also *Rh.* 2.5.1383a3–6), but here we are concerned with motivation (action-prompting desires).

(a) McDowell's reading

On McDowell's (1978) view, Aristotle's virtuous agent is unconflicted and does not possess any bad motives. McDowell notes that virtues such as temperance and courage involve steadfastness in the face of characteristic sorts of temptation, and that it can seem impossible to register this fact without regarding them as cases of *enkrateia*.¹⁴ As McDowell sees it, Aristotle insists on the distinction between virtue and *enkrateia* and so holds that the proper manifestation of virtues such as courage and temperance is 'a renunciation, without struggle, of something that in the abstract one would value highly (physical pleasure, security of life and limb)' (1978: 27). On McDowell's reading:

The lack of struggle is ensured by keeping the attention firmly fixed on what Aristotle calls 'the noble'; not by a weighing of attractions that leads to the conclusion that on balance the virtuous course is more desirable. (It is true that the competing course could not really satisfy a virtuous person; it records a consequence of his conviction that in these circumstances the attractions of the competing course count for nothing.) (1978: 27)

Hence:

If a situation in which virtue imposes a requirement is genuinely conceived as such, according to this view, then considerations that, in the absence of the requirement, would have constituted reasons for acting otherwise are silenced altogether – not overridden – by the requirement. (1978: 26)¹⁵

This facilitates a distinction between virtuous and *enkratic* agents. The considerations that count for nothing with the virtuous agent will not be silenced in the *enkratic* agent; therefore, in the latter, they will need to be overridden by the recognition of the requirement of virtue.

¹⁴ Throughout my discussion in this chapter (as well as in quotations) I have altered McDowell's 'incontinence' and 'continence' to 'akrasia' and 'enkrateia'.

¹⁵ McDowell illustrates the idea of 'silencing' with Mark 8:38: "'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?' Obviously we are not meant to answer 'The profits are outweighed by counterbalancing losses'. The intended answer is 'Nothing'. At that price, whatever one might achieve does not count as profit. Or, in the terminology of reasons: the attractions of whatever wickedness might bring do not constitute some reason for wickedness, which is, however, overridden by the reasons against it; rather, given that they are achieved by wickedness, those attractive outcomes do not count as reasons at all' (1978: 26).

How is it that the virtuous agent's grasp of the requirement can silence contrary motivations but the enkratic agent's grasp of it cannot, and so needs to be overridden? Clearly the enkratic agent must in some sense conceive of the situation in a way that matches the way the virtuous agent would conceive it, since he knows what virtue demands. But, as we have seen, on McDowell's view, the virtuous person 'conceives the relevant sorts of situation in such a way that considerations that would otherwise be reasons for acting differently are silenced by the recognised requirement' (1978: 28). So if the enkratic agent possessed such a conception he would not possess contrary motivations. McDowell responds as follows:

The way out is to attenuate the degree to which the enkratic or akratic person's conception of the situation matches that of a virtuous person. Their inclinations are aroused, as the virtuous person's are not, by their awareness of competing attractions: a lively desire clouds or blurs the focus of their attention on 'the noble'. (1978: 28)

On this view:

the relevant conceptions are not so much as possessed except by those whose wills are influenced appropriately. (1978: 23)

Thus, the enkratic agent's conception of his situation and his recognition of the requirement does not in fact *quite* match the virtuous agent's, on McDowell's account. For, particular conceptions of situations entail certain sorts of corresponding motivation.

Consider the virtuous agent further. Does McDowell think (i) that the virtuous agent is aware of the attractions, but that these do not arouse his inclinations, or (ii) that his inclinations are not aroused because he is not aware of the attractions? McDowell's claim that the inclinations of enkratic and akratic agents 'are aroused, as the virtuous person's are not, by their awareness of competing attractions' (1978: 28) could be understood in either way. McDowell does claim:

Genuinely courageous behaviour, on this view, combines a lively awareness of risk, and a normal valuation of life and health (see *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.9), with a sort of serenity; taking harm to be, by definition, what one has reason to avoid, we can see the serenity as based on the belief, paradoxical in juxtaposition with the valuing of life and health, that no harm can come to one by acting thus. (1978: 27–28)

McDowell's claim that Aristotle's courageous agent believes that no harm can come to him by acting the way that he believes he is

required to (and thus that he manifests a certain sort of 'serenity') might appear to suggest that he thinks that Aristotle's courageous agent does not feel fear at all.¹⁶ Transferred over to temperance, this would suggest not only that the temperate agent would not *desire* to do anything that he recognises he should not do, but also that he would not even find prospectively pleasurable anything that he recognises he should not do. On this view, a temperate agent would never even think, for example, that it would be more pleasurable to sit on the couch rather than do the gruelling 10k run in the rain, if the latter is what he thinks he should do. However, in a later essay, McDowell indicates that he does not ascribe this account of temperance to Aristotle. He writes (in a discussion of Aristotle):

There need be no implication that the attractiveness of the competing course goes dim, in the view of the situation that the practically wise person achieves. The pleasure is there to be had, by the practically wise person no less than by anyone else. He can be completely aware of the attractiveness of the competing course; it is just that he is not attracted to it. (1996b: 103)

On this view (= (i) above), even when the temperate agent recognises that virtue demands that he must do the gruelling run in the rain, he can nonetheless see that it would be more pleasurable to sit on the couch. He will, however, remain distinct from enkratic (and akratic) agents owing to the fact that in him such awareness will not instil a *motivation* to remain on the couch. Applied back to courage, this would suggest that the courageous agent could feel the fear (distress at the prospect of the danger) so long as, owing to his recognition that he must stand firm, he is not in turn motivated to flee.

(b) Charles' reading

David Charles' (1984) interpretation of Aristotle's account of virtue contrasts sharply with McDowell's. On Charles' reading, Aristotle thinks that both courage and temperance 'involve a certain type of counter-goal, and hence are essentially conflict

¹⁶ Cf. Charles (1995: 145n.10, and also 143; tied to McDowell at 141).

virtues' (1984: 170).¹⁷ Even the virtuous agent, on this view, must possess conflicting motivations. Charles is most explicit about this with respect to courage. On his reading, Aristotle does indeed think that even the courageous agent feels fear. However, as Charles sees it:

Given Aristotle's characterisation of fear as painful, the courageous man will not only be aware of the risks he runs, but also desire (to an extent) to avoid them. There seems to be no mechanism in Aristotle's theory to prevent fear from engaging the inclinations even of the courageous man ... (1984: 170n.6; see also 175)¹⁸

And something similar seems to apply to the temperate agent as well, on Charles' view. He possesses a sensual desire that he has to overcome (1984: 173), and does so presumably because he is aware of some prospective pleasure (that he nonetheless recognises that he should not, in this context at least, seek to attain) and this entails a desire to act that way.

Given that the virtuous agent has conflicting motivations, on Charles' interpretation, how can he be distinguished from the enkratic agent? On Charles' account, although both are conflict virtues, temperance and courage function slightly differently from each other in this respect.

(a) The temperate agent acts '*with pleasure overall*, having successfully overcome his sensual desire' (1984: 173, my emphasis). The 'overall' is crucial here, for:

the virtuous agent would have the sensual pleasure of acting against his better judgement, but this would be out-weighed by his pain in not pursuing (e.g.) health arising from (i) the frustration of his desire for health, (ii) regret at not acting on his best judgement, (iii) the frustration of his preferential desire. [= *prohairesis*] (1984: 169n.5)

By contrast, the enkratic agent, in this sphere, acts 'without pain overall', but:

would enjoy overall acting against his best judgement – and hence has not completely overcome his sensual desire. (1984: 173)

Were (counterfactually) the enkratic agent to act against his best judgement, he would enjoy it overall, whereas the temperate agent would not.

¹⁷ For courage, see also Pears (1978, 1980).

¹⁸ See also Pears (1978: 279, 1980: 174) and Leighton (1988: 92).

(b) The courageous agent, by contrast, acts '*without pain overall*, having successfully overcome his fear' (1984: 173, my emphasis). Again, the 'overall' is important: the virtuous agent, on Charles' reading, will have the distress that occurs from the object of his fear materialising (and his desire to get away from it being thwarted), but this will be out-weighed by various desires pointing the other direction. The courageous agent's *enkratic equivalent*, by contrast:¹⁹

resists because it is noble, but does so with pain overall, because he has not successfully overcome his fear. (1984: 173)

This agent, unlike the courageous person, is pained overall by standing up to the danger.

With respect to both courage and temperance, on Charles' interpretation, the enkratic equivalent is motivationally defective because he experiences excessive desires for the counter-goal, whereas his virtuous cousin only possesses moderate ones.²⁰

3. What is Aristotle's account?

Which, if either, of McDowell's and Charles' interpretations is correct? I shall break my answer into two parts: first, addressing the question of whether or not Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent forms the relevant evaluative impressions (prospective pleasure, prospective danger); and, second, considering whether

¹⁹ As noted in [Chapter 5](#) (p. 123n.25), Charles (1984: 169–76) claims that Aristotle does not apply *akrasia* and *enkrateia* to the domain of courage. On Charles' account, Aristotle thinks that the man (referred to above as 'the courageous agent's enkratic equivalent') who is pained, but stands his ground, is, strictly speaking, a coward, not enkratic. Charles appeals to *NE* 2.3.1104b6–8 ('he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is courageous, while the man who is pained is a coward'), but this is perhaps a careless overstatement on Aristotle's part (he might really want: 'the man who is pained, and so runs away'), and so Charles might be making too much of it. At any rate, these lines need to be juxtaposed with *NE* 1.13 (1102b26–28), quoted below, where *both* the temperate and the courageous agent are contrasted with the enkratic agent.

²⁰ The idea expressed in Charles (2006), which we considered in §1 above, would not require him to alter his general reading of Aristotle's account of virtue. For Charles can obviously still hold that Aristotle thinks that the courageous agent experiences fear, and that this entails a motivation (which is in turn overridden), even if the motivation is just another way of describing the fear, not a separate state entailed by it.

he thinks that the virtuous agent can be conflicted or must remain unconflicted.

(a) *Does the virtuous agent undergo the relevant evaluative impressions?*

Charles appears to think that the virtuous agent can (within a certain range, at least) grasp that doing something he recognises he should not do is prospectively pleasurable or dangerous. McDowell holds the same view with respect to prospective pleasures although the ‘serenity’ passage (see p. 234 above) was ambiguous on this question with respect to fear. I think that it is likely that Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent can grasp both of these evaluative prospects. In fact, I think that this is clearest with fear. Aristotle writes:

What is frightening (*to phoberon*) is not the same for all men; but we say that some things are actually frightening beyond human capability. These, then, are frightening to everyone – at least to every sensible man; but the frightening things that are within human capability differ in magnitude and degree, and so too do the things that inspire confidence. Now the courageous man is as dauntless (*anekplêktos*) as man may be. Therefore, while he will fear even the things that are not beyond human capability, he will face them as he ought and as reason directs, for the sake of the noble; for this is the end of virtue. But it is possible to fear these more, or less, and again to fear things that are not frightening as if they were. (*NE* 3.7.1115b7–15)

With some things it is beyond a human being’s power not to fear them (unless the human is mad), whereas with others it is possible to fear them or not fear them. And yet Aristotle here explicitly claims that the courageous man will not only fear the things that it is beyond human capability not to fear, he will also fear (some of)²¹ the things that it is *not* beyond human capability not to fear (although he will *face up* (*hupomenein*) to these things, if the end is noble; a point I shall return to below).

It is worth emphasising *why* Aristotle thinks that the courageous agent must feel fear. Aristotle holds that the courageous agent’s emotions and actions must be appropriate for the circumstances in question. In *NE* 3.7, he writes:

²¹ I add ‘some of’ to rule out him fearing the squeak of mice, or doors creaking, or anything else that he should not fear *at all*.

The man, then, who faces and who fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and from the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is courageous; for the courageous man feels and acts according to the merits of the case (*kat' axian*) and in whatever way reason directs. (1115b17–20)

Now Aristotelian courage is manifested most purely in situations that require one to risk one's life in battle (1115a32–35). But it is not as if Aristotle thinks that the courageous person should have no concern for his death. On the contrary, in *NE* 3.9 he claims that the more virtuous and happy an agent is, the more he will be pained at the thought of his death, since life is best worth living for such a man, and he is thereby knowingly losing the greatest of goods (1117b10–13). Thus, in life-threatening situations at war, if the courageous agent is to feel (*paschein*) 'according to the merits of the case' (or: 'as is fitting': *kat' axian*), he will experience fear: he is confronted by an evil (knowingly losing his own life) that is close at hand, is significantly great, and causes him distress. Not to do so would make him excessively fearless (see *NE* 3.7.1115b24–28).²²

Given that Aristotle thinks that the courageous agent feels fear, there seems little reason to think that he would not also allow that the temperate agent *could* be aware that certain actions would be pleasurable even when he recognises that he should not do them. But is there a reason to think that the temperate agent will in fact tend to be aware of such things, analogous to the reason we have just seen that the courageous agent should feel fear? Here is a consideration that might be adduced. The temperate agent is not insensible: he is allowed to enjoy permissible bodily pleasures in appropriate situations. (Of course, there are some activities that he should not find prospectively pleasurable *at all*, i.e. those activities that he ought not to perform in *any* circumstances (as e.g. the pleasure of committing 'adultery' (*moicheia*) (*NE* 2.6.1107a15–17) seems to be – although see n.24 below – or rape, or eating human flesh, etc., may be), but there are also other activities that it *is* legitimate for him to enjoy (so long as nothing makes doing so inappropriate at the point of time in question) as may sometimes

²² Cf. also Charles (1995: 146–7).

be the case with lying on the couch or eating the cream cake.) But then, given that it would be legitimate for the temperate agent to take pleasure in various activities if circumstances permit, it would seem hard to prevent him from cognising that such activities *would* provide him with bodily pleasure, were he to perform them, even in situations in which he now recognises that he *should not* pursue them (as may be the case, for example, with lying on the couch when the agent judges that he ought to go for a run). Indeed, to paraphrase Charles, it is hard to see how there could be a mechanism to prevent this, given that the cognition only concerns the prospect of bodily pleasure in either case. The general point is clearer still when we note that it seems possible that someone might be taken by surprise by some chance encounter. Suppose Smith is invited by his incredibly attractive boss, Ms Scarlet, for dinner, in order to discuss the new contract their company has just won. The wine is flowing and, after dinner, Smith and Scarlet sit down on the couch to look over the portfolio. As they are reading, Scarlet's hand slips onto Smith's leg, perhaps innocently. Smith turns to her, and Scarlet promptly plants a sensuous kiss on Smith's lips. Smith has to admit the experience is enjoyable: Scarlet is an incredibly attractive woman after all. However, Smith is happily married and thinks that it is never right for him to cheat on his wife.²³ Most would accept that a fully virtuous version of Smith should not pursue the liaison. But it might seem difficult to prevent the kiss from feeling (even the slightest bit) pleasurable to Smith, at least initially: Scarlet is very attractive, and Smith has a healthy sexual appetite.²⁴

²³ I suspect that Aristotle might have this kind of case in mind in *NE* 7.6 (1149a34–1149b1), when he claims that perception can inform us that something is pleasant (note he does not say 'will be pleasant') and this arouse an epithumia. For a discussion of this aspect of the *NE* 7.6 passage, see Pearson (2011b: §1).

²⁴ Clearly a virtuous version of Smith should not find the *prospect* of an adulterous relationship with Scarlet pleasurable (cf. *NE* 2.6.1107a15–17). Nor should any pleasure he experiences when Scarlet kisses him be associated with the thought 'Great! I'm kissing someone *other than* my wife!', but with these (and any other such) caveats in place it would seem hard to prevent the kiss from appearing pleasurable to Smith, at least momentarily. (See also the example I provide in my 2011(b): §7.)

(b) *Can the virtuous agent be unconflicted,
on Aristotle's account?*

Now turn to the question of whether Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent is motivationally conflicted or not. Charles thinks that Aristotle has no mechanism to prevent even the temperate and courageous agent from possessing conflicting motivations, and so claims that both 'are essentially conflict virtues' (1984: 170). McDowell, by contrast, thinks that the virtuous agent's perception of the situation 'silences' any errant motivations, and hence that he is entirely unconflicted. I shall argue in the remainder of this section that the texts indicate that Aristotle holds that the virtuous agent *can* be entirely unconflicted, but that he will also allow us to call an agent who is *slightly* conflicted 'virtuous'. If this is right, I shall then have to face Charles' problem concerning the apparent lack of a mechanism to prevent such evaluative impressions from engaging the inclinations, and also explain how my view differs from McDowell's. These tasks shall be tackled in §4.

That Aristotle allows that the virtuous agent can be unconflicted seems to be the clear implication of a passage in *NE* 1.13 (discussed, in part, in [Chapter 6](#)):

we praise the reason of the enkratic man and of the akratic man, and the part of their soul that has reason, since it urges them aright and towards the best objects, but there is found in them also another natural element beside reason, which fights against reason and resists it. For exactly as paralysed limbs when we choose to move them to the right turn on the contrary to the left, so is it with the soul; the impulses (*hormai*) of akratic people move in contrary directions. But while in the body we see that which moves astray, in the soul we do not. No doubt, however, we must none the less suppose that in the soul too there is something beside reason, resisting and opposing it ... Now even this [non-rational part] seems to have a share in reason, as we said; at any rate in the enkratic agent it obeys reason – and presumably in the temperate and courageous agent it is still more ready to listen; for in him it speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as reason. (1102b14–28)

The non-rational part that resists and opposes reason in akratic and enkratic agents (although it ultimately ends up 'obeying' in the latter) will, in virtuous agents – and note Aristotle explicitly mentions both the temperate and the courageous agent – speak with the same voice as (or 'sound together': *homophônein*) reason, and will do so *on all matters* (*panta*).

The notion that the temperate agent, in particular, is unconflicted seems further confirmed in Aristotle's specific discussion of temperance in *NE* 3.10–12, since (as we have noted at various points in earlier chapters) he holds:

the epithumêtikon in a temperate man should harmonise (*sumphônein*) with reason; for the noble is the aim for both, and the temperate man has epithumiai (*epithumêin*) for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (*NE* 1119b15–18)

The non-rational epithumiai of the temperate agent, it seems, are *in line with*, not in tension with, what it is noble for him to aim at.²⁵

What about courage? In spite of the fact (discussed in §3(a)) that Aristotle appears to think that the courageous agent experiences fear, he *also* sometimes characterises the courageous agent as *fearless*. For example, in *NE* 3.6, he claims:

Properly, then, he will be called courageous who is fearless in face of a noble death, and of all emergencies that involve death ... (1115a32–35)²⁶

But how can the courageous agent both feel appropriate fear and yet also be fearless? The most plausible answer is that Aristotle is employing two different notions of 'fear'. In the *NE* 3.7 passage that we quoted in §3(a) above (1115b7–15), Aristotle claimed that the courageous agent, though afraid, would nevertheless *stand up to* the things he fears (and so would be 'as dauntless as man may be'), if doing so would be for the sake of the noble and as reason directs. But this invites the idea that Aristotle uses two different significations of 'fear': one in which the courageous agent will rationally feel it, and another in which he will be courageously fearless. The Greek for 'fear', *phobos*, like our 'fear', can be used in two senses. It can, on the one hand, be used, as it is in *Rh.* 2.5, to refer to an evaluative impression an agent has of some destructive or painful evil in the future (*Rh.* 2.5.1382a21–22, quoted in

²⁵ Charles writes: 'The temperate man possesses moderate desires for pleasures which are not base or too expensive (1119a16–20); if so, he will have a range of internal opponents in the case of permissible desires which aim at certain sensual pleasures' (1984: 170). I do not accept the inference: the epithumiai of the temperate agent (described in *NE* 3.11.1119a16–19) are not, as I see it, ones that he has to *fight against*; they are, rather, ones that direct him towards acts that it is legitimate for him, i.e. in accordance with nobility, to perform.

²⁶ See also e.g. *NE* 3.6. 1115a16, *NE* 3.8.1117a18–20.

§1 above). In this sense of 'fear', the courageous agent experiences fear: he undergoes a distressful impression that is coordinate to the danger in question (for the reason we mentioned on pp. 238–9).²⁷ And, on the other hand, it can be used to refer to a motivation of the agent, a desire to escape the feared object. In this sense of 'fear', the courageous agent is fearless 'towards' (*pros*) the things in question and 'endures' (*hupomenein*) them (*EE* 3.1.1228b26–27, *NE* 3.7.1115b12–13), i.e. is motivated to stand firm and face them. Given this, Aristotle's account of courage can fit the proposed model: the courageous agent can feel fear without that leading to a motivation to flee; he can experience fear whilst being motivationally fearless.²⁸

If the argument so far suggests that Aristotle's courageous agent at least *can* be unconflicted at the motivational level, we may now ask whether he thinks that the courageous agent *must* be unconflicted in this way in order to count as courageous. A passage in *EE* 3.1 appears to be instructive in this respect. Aristotle writes:

perhaps we use 'frightening' (*to phoberon*) – like 'pleasant' and 'good' – in two senses. Some things are pleasant and good absolutely, whereas others are so to a particular person but absolutely are bad and unpleasant – e.g. what is useful to the wicked, or pleasant to children as such; and similarly the frightening is either absolutely such or such to a particular person. What, then, a coward as such fears is not frightening to anyone or but slightly so, but what is frightening to the majority of men or to human nature, that we call absolutely frightening. But the courageous man shows himself fearless (*aphobôs*) towards these things and endures such things, they being to him frightening in one sense but not in another – frightening to him qua man, but not frightening to him except slightly so, or not at all, qua courageous. (1228b17–29)

²⁷ His fear perhaps cannot be *just* as the definition in *Rh.* 2.5 (quoted in §1) states, it seems, because Aristotle characterises fear there as a 'distress or disturbance' (*lupê ê tarachê*), but claims elsewhere that the courageous agent is *undisturbed* (*atarachos*) (*NE* 3.8.1117a19, *NE* 3.9.1117a31). However, if the disturbance component in the *Rh.* definition is optional (as suggested by the 'or'), its presence there will obviously not be problematic. The definition of fear in *NE* 3.6.1115a9 ('expectation of evil') does not mention disturbance. Alternatively, we may think that just as Aristotle possesses two notions of fear, so he possesses two different notions of 'disturbance', one as an evaluative impression, and the other as a motivation, and that he has these different notions in play in the passages referred to above.

²⁸ I am not the first to suggest that Aristotle employs two notions of fear; see e.g. Pears (1978: 281–2, 1980: 178–9) and Heil (1996); cf. Broadie (1991: 91) and Charles (1995: 143–4). (However, Pears and Charles think that where there is a distress there must also be a desire.)

The first two-thirds of the passage make a point about objectivity: some things are terrifying to the majority of men or to human nature (cf. the ‘things frightening beyond human capability’ which were fearful to ‘every sensible man’ in *NE* 3.7.1115b8–9, quoted above), while other things are only fearful to a particular subset of people, e.g. cowards. In the last part of the passage, Aristotle then notes that there is nevertheless a sense in which the courageous agent is *fearless*, or only *slightly* afraid, of the things that are fearful to all sane people. This, it seems, is that he is fearless, or only *slightly* afraid, ‘towards’ these things and ‘endures’ them, i.e. is motivated to stand firm and face up to the things in question. This, in turn, suggests that the courageous man’s fear ‘qua man’ should be understood along the lines we have gathered from *NE* 3.7, i.e. that he is afraid in the straightforward sense of undergoing a distressful impression of the impending danger (‘qua man’ because, as a man, he is mortal and his life is in extreme danger).

If this is the right way to read the passage, it is notable that twice Aristotle allows that the courageous agent can experience *slight* motivational fear. According to this text, then, the courageous agent *may* have no motivational fear (hence ‘or not at all’ is said to be an option), but if he experiences slight motivational fear, that will not disqualify him from counting as courageous.²⁹ Thus, contra Charles, Aristotle does appear to think that virtuous agents can be unconflicted and yet, contra McDowell, he also appears to think that slightly conflicted agents can still count as virtuous.

²⁹ Price (1995: 195n.23) understands the *EE* 3.1 passage differently. As he reads it, Aristotle is claiming that courageous men fear fearful things because they are men, ‘but do so only slightly because they are brave men; in short they are as “dauntless as men may be” (*NE* 3.7.1115b11)’ (1995: 195n.23). On this view, there is only really one notion of fear and the courageous man experiences it as little as possible. I would resist this as follows: (i) the passage actually claims that, qua courageous, the agent experiences fear ‘slightly or not at all’ (*êrema ê oudamôs*), but if ‘not at all’ is a possibility then the passage (on Price’s reading) would be claiming (on the ‘not at all’ variation) that the courageous agent experiences fear – because he is a man – but *also* does not experience (the same notion of) fear – because he is courageous – which looks contradictory (Price covers this up by only picking up the ‘slightly’ not the ‘not at all’ in his gloss); (ii) if the sense in which the courageous agent does experience fear can be ‘not at all’ that might seem to conflict with the *NE* 3.7 passage already quoted, which claims that he will fear even the things that it is not beyond a human not to fear (1115b7–15) (that there are two notions of fear gets around this problem); (iii) if the courageous agent might not experience any fear, it would be hard (on the view that there is only one notion of fear in play) to distinguish him from the excessively fearless agent (*NE* 3.7.1115b24–28) in

If a parallel account applies to temperance as well, Aristotle would think that it is *possible* for temperate agents not to experience *any* errant desires for bodily pleasures (i.e. for bodily pleasures that he recognises, in the circumstances in question, he should not pursue), but will allow that a *very slight* desire for such a bodily pleasure would not disqualify the agent from counting as temperate.

4. How could the virtuous agent be as Aristotle presumes he is? McDowell and Charles revisited

I have argued that Aristotle thinks that it is possible for virtuous agents to be motivationally unconflicted, even if slight motivational conflict would not disqualify an agent as virtuous. But if it is possible, on his account, for virtuous agents to be unconflicted, we now need to address Charles' problem: what mechanism is there in Aristotle's theory that can prevent e.g. fear from engaging the inclinations?

It might seem that a revised version of McDowell's interpretation can answer this question while remaining faithful to the position we have developed. On McDowell's view, the mechanism that explains how the virtuous agent's inclinations are not aroused is that such an agent possesses a special conception of his situation so that although the attractions are visible (or are so at least with temperance, see pp. 234–5 above), they 'count for nothing' (are 'silenced') given the agent's recognition of a specific requirement. McDowell, it seems, could take on board the fact that Aristotle allows that agents who are slightly conflicted still count as virtuous by maintaining, in parallel with this, that agents who have a *slightly flawed* conception of the situation, a conception

such circumstances; (iv) Price's reading does not allow much scope for the courageous agent's fear to be appropriate to the situation (unless this is to mean: 'always very little'): he seems only to be allowed 'slight' fear even though losing his life is an extremely bad thing; (v) *NE* 3.7.1115b10–12 runs: '[1] the courageous man is as dauntless as man may be. *Therefore*, [2] while he will fear even the things that are not beyond human capability, he will [3] *face them* as he ought and as reason directs [...]' (numbers and emphasis added). As I read it, [1] refers to a motive, which is then picked up by [3] (hence: 'face them'). Since the courageous agent is as dauntless as man may be, he will 'face' the things that he fears in the evaluative impression sense, which [2] refers to.

that permits a very small amount of errant inclinations, would still count as virtuous. We would still have a principled distinction between virtuous agents and enkratic agents, on this account, since the latter would have more substantially flawed conceptions of the situation, ones which permit full-blown inclinations to arise (and so need resisting), and which consequently might involve the agent regretting (overall) that he had to act virtuously.³⁰

However, I shall now argue that the way in which McDowell connects an agent's conception of his situation to his motivations does not actually fit Aristotle's account. If this is right, an alternative approach will be required to deal with Charles' worry. In order to see the problem with McDowell's account, we shall need to probe more deeply into it. This shall, in turn, require us to draw more generally from his various papers on Aristotle's ethics.³¹

(a) McDowell revisited

McDowell thinks that all, or at least nearly all, Aristotelian agents possess a conception of their eudaimonia, in the sense of 'conception of eudaimonia' I called 'embodied' in [Chapter 6](#) (§1).³² On this view, a conception of eudaimonia

cannot be pinned down in abstraction from the ability to put it into practice in recognising specific occasions for action ... there is nothing for grasp of the content of the universal to be except a capacity to read the details of situations in the light of a way of valuing actions into which proper upbringing has habituated one. (1996a: 23)³³

Or, as McDowell puts it in another essay:

Having the right end is not a mere aggregate of concerns; it requires the capacity to know which should be acted on when. If that capacity cannot be identified with

³⁰ Cf. Charles' appeal to counterfactuals; see §2(b) above.

³¹ Given that McDowell appears to take Aristotle's view, as he reconstructs it, to be a plausible account (one that he seems to endorse), it is surely worth discussing these aspects of his interpretation in detail, but the discussion shall also serve to clarify the relation that *Aristotle* thinks holds between an agent's conception of his situation and his motivations.

³² A notion which does not entail ascribing to them a 'grand end' or 'blueprint' of the good; see [Chapter 6](#). 'Or at least nearly all' to reflect *EE* 1.2.1214b6–12 (quoted [Chapter 6](#), p. 154n.27, above); see McDowell (1995: 201 and 201n.1: evidently not reading the passage as advocating a grand-end view); but that restriction is not important here since, on McDowell's view, it does not apply to the relevant cases (viz. virtuous, akratics, enkratics, vicious); but cf. [Chapter 6](#), p. 154n.27, above, on certain vicious agents.

³³ Cf. also Wiggins (1980a: 252, quoted in [Chapter 6](#), p. 142n.8, above).

acceptance of a set of rules [which McDowell has argued it cannot], there is really nothing for it to be except the capacity to get things right occasion by occasion; that is, the perceptual capacity that determines which feature of the situation should engage a standing concern. (1998: 30)

Now consider whether when an agent acts akratically, he acts for the sake of (his conception of) eudaimonia. McDowell points out that this would be problematic:

When someone acts akratically in pursuit of a pleasure, he differs from an intemperate person – who would also pursue the pleasure – in that pursuit of the pleasure would conform to the intemperate person's conception of the sort of life a human being should lead (hence, his conception of eudaimonia); whereas for the akratic person that is precisely not so. The akratic person has a different conception of what it is to do well (i.e. of eudaimonia), but allows himself to pursue a goal whose pursuit in the circumstances he knows to be incompatible with what, in those circumstances, doing well would be. So his action, though voluntary, is not undertaken for the sake of (his conception of) eudaimonia. (1980: 360–1)

McDowell's responds to the problem as follows:

The best resolution is to suppose that a *prohairesis* [choice] is a deliberative desire to do something with a view to doing well (*eupraxia*: see *NE* 6.2.1139a31–b5). 'Doing well' (*eu prattein*) is by common consent a synonym for 'having eudaimonia' (*NE* 1.4.1095a19–20). (1980: 361)

It is only *chosen* acts that are tied to the agent's conception of eudaimonia, on McDowell's view, and so since the akratic agent does not choose the acts that he akratically performs (i.e. although they are performed voluntarily, they do not count as chosen), we can explain why he – in contrast to the intemperate agent – does not count as acting in accordance with his conception of eudaimonia.

This has an important consequence. Aristotle thinks that virtuous agents and enkratic/akratic agents each form the correct choice. Clearly virtuous agents must do so, but so do enkratic and akratic agents. Aristotle claims that the enkratic agent abides by, whereas the akratic agent abandons, 'true reasoning and the correct choice' (*NE* 7.9.1151a29–1151b4). (Although the akratic agent abandons and acts against the correct choice, he has nonetheless *formed* it: Aristotle tells us that he is only half-wicked because his choice is good (*NE* 7.10.1152a16–17).)³⁴ But then if,

³⁴ See, in general, *NE* 7.8–10; cf. also *NE* 3.2.1111b13–15. The claim that the akratic agent has made a (correct) choice, strictly speaking, applies only to weak akratics, not to the

as McDowell suggests, (i) it is an agent's choices that are tied to his (embodied) conception of eudaimonia, and if, as we now see, (ii) virtuous, enkratic and akratic agents each form the correct choice, then (iii) virtuous, enkratic and akratic agents must have *the same* conception of eudaimonia. For if an agent's choices are tied to his conception of eudaimonia, and his choices are correct, then he must have a correct conception of eudaimonia. And, as we have seen, virtuous, enkratic and akratic agents each form the correct choice.

But the notion that virtuous, enkratic and akratic agents each have the same (embodied) conception of eudaimonia conflicts with McDowell's view that differences in agents' conceptions of a situation will on their own explain differences in their motivations. As we saw in §2, McDowell thinks that the virtuous agent conceives of the relevant sorts of situation in such a way that considerations that would otherwise be reasons for acting differently are 'silenced' by the recognised requirement (1978: 28). And, as we also saw, this required McDowell to claim that we must 'attenuate' the degree to which enkratic or akratic agents' conceptions of such situations match the virtuous agent's (1978: 28). Indeed, as McDowell explicitly states: 'the relevant conceptions are not so much as possessed except by those whose wills are influenced appropriately' (1978: 23). But then if, as we saw at the beginning of this section, there is, on McDowell's account, nothing for a conception of eudaimonia to be *except* 'the perceptual capacity that determines which feature of the situation should engage a standing concern' or 'a capacity to read the details of situations in the light of a way of valuing actions into which proper upbringing has habituated one' (1996a: 23), it would seem that virtuous and akratic/enkratic agents will *not*, after all, possess the same conception of eudaimonia. In fact, McDowell implicitly acknowledges this point in the very paper in which he aligns an agent's conception of eudaimonia with his *chosen* actions. Later on in that same paper, he writes:

impetuous variety, since the latter, we are told, 'do not deliberate at all' (they are nonetheless akratic because they subsequently regret their acts); see e.g. *NE* 7.7.1150b19–26, *NE* 7.8.1151a1–5, *NE* 7.10.1152a18–19.

To embrace a specific conception of eudaimonia is to see the relevant reasons for acting, on occasions when they coexist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, as, not overriding, but silencing those other considerations – as bringing it about that, in the circumstances, they are not reasons at all. (1980: 370)

In a note cued from the end of this paragraph (374n.24), McDowell explicitly refers the reader back to his earlier (1978) distinction ‘between virtue and *enkrateia*’ that we have been examining. On this account, the virtuous agent and the *enkratic/akratic* do *not* share the same conception of eudaimonia because a correct conception of eudaimonia (on this notion) would *silence*, not override, errant motivations; and such silencing only occurs in virtuous agents.

In short, McDowell appears to hold both that virtuous, *enkratic* and *akratic* agents each form the same conception of eudaimonia (in so far as an agent’s conception of eudaimonia aligns with his choices, and each of these agents forms the correct choice) *and also* that virtuous and *enkratic/akratic* agents form fundamentally different conceptions of eudaimonia (because the virtuous agent’s conception of eudaimonia entails that errant motivations are silenced, whereas the *akratic* or *enkratic* agent’s does not). But clearly McDowell cannot consistently hold both of these views. The cause of the trouble is that McDowell feels compelled, on the one hand, to acknowledge that Aristotle aligns an agent’s (embodied) conception of eudaimonia with that agent’s choices, while wishing, on the other hand, to hold on to his cognitivist view that conceptions of eudaimonia (which seem to be equivalent to McDowell’s (1978) notion of ‘conceptions of situations’, given the way he unpacks the notion of an embodied conception of eudaimonia) can account for all the morally salient features of a situation (and so explain the *difference* between virtuous and *enkratic/akratic* agents). But he cannot have both these things.

In one respect, we can sympathise with McDowell’s predicament, since a parallel problem exists with Aristotle’s notion of an agent’s character. Aristotle explicitly aligns an agent’s choices with his moral character.³⁵ Thus, since virtuous, *enkratic* and

³⁵ See the references in [Chapter 6](#), §4, p. 167, above. As we noted, there are exceptions to the general claim, but not in a way that undercuts the current point.

akratic agents each form the correct choice, they should possess the same characters. Indeed, Aristotle does sometimes write in ways that suggest just this. He claims that akratic agents 'are not unjust, but they will do unjust acts' (*NE* 7.8.1151a10, cf. *NE* 7.10.1152a17–18).³⁶ However, of course, there is another sense in which Aristotle thinks that enkratic/akratic agents *do not* share the same character as virtuous agents. For virtues are *themselves* states of character, and akratic/enkratic agents do not possess virtues. This broad sense of character can be seen, for example, in the following passage:

Nor can the same man have practical wisdom and be akratic; for it has been shown that a man is at the same time practically wise, and good in respect of character (*ethos*). (*NE* 7.10.1152a6–8)

In this sense of 'character' the akratic/enkratic agent does not share the same character as the practically wise (fully virtuous) agent. Aristotle thus appears subject to a similar difficulty to the one we witnessed with McDowell's account of his view: virtuous agents' characters both do and do not distinguish them from enkratic/akratic agents.

Let us draw a distinction, here, to try to tidy things up. Let us say that 'character in the narrow sense' picks out the agent's character in the sense in which that aligns with his choices. And let us say that 'character in the broad sense' picks out the agent's character in the sense in which virtues are themselves states of character, and in which the practically wise agent's character is not shared by enkratic/akratic agents. Virtuous, enkratic and akratic agents have the same character in the narrow sense (their choices are the same), but have different characters in the broad sense (akratic and enkratic agents fall short of virtue).

In similar vein, perhaps McDowell could adopt a parallel strategy to deal with his problem. He could say that there are two different notions of 'conception of eudaimonia' in play: a narrow one which aligns with the agent's choices (and so serves to distinguish *intemperate* from akratic agents), and a broad one which serves to distinguish *virtuous* from enkratic/akratic agents. He could then

³⁶ For more on the notion of acting unjustly without being unjust, see *NE* 5.8 and Pearson (2006).

insist that it was the 'broad' notion of 'conception of eudaimonia' that he was referring to with the notion of an agent's 'conception of his situation' in passages such as the following:

the virtuous person conceives the relevant sorts of situation in such a way that considerations that would otherwise be reasons for acting differently are silenced by the recognised requirement. (1978: 28)

On this broad notion, virtuous and akratic/enkratic agents do not share the same conception of the situation.

In this guise, my problem with McDowell's account becomes the following: in so far as virtuous, enkratic and akratic agents each form the *same* (i.e. correct) choice, they seem to be most naturally understood as sharing *the same conception of their situation*. They each understand *what* they should do, they have each reasoned correctly, and (as we agreed earlier) they are each aware of the competing attractions. The difference between them seems to be marked by the fact that enkratic/akratic agents form errant motivations in response to that conception of the situation, whereas virtuous agents do not. If this is right, the cognitivist strand in McDowell's account of Aristotle – which ties conceptions of situations to motivations – is off-track. The difference between virtuous and enkratic/akratic agents will be explained not in terms of their differing conceptions of the situation, but in terms of whether or not they form errant non-rational desires in response to the same conception of the situation. If so, we must finally address Charles' worry.

(b) *Charles revisited*

If the enkratic (or akratic) agent's conception of the situation is just the same as the virtuous agent's, and yet the former possesses errant motivations whereas the latter does not, this seems in need of explanation. With respect to the courageous agent's fear, Charles claims, as we have seen, that since fear is painful there seems to be no mechanism to prevent it from engaging the inclinations even in the virtuous agent (1984: 170n.6; see also 175). I have suggested that Aristotle *would* allow that errant inclinations can be engaged *slightly* without that disqualifying the agent as virtuous. But I have

also suggested that Aristotle appears to accept that virtuous agents *can* be conflict-free. And yet, as we have seen, I also hold that Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent does in fact experience fear (qua distressful impression), and indeed would not be fully virtuous if he did not do so. But if fear is distressful, we seem to need a mechanism to explain how it is possible, in virtuous agents, for such distress not to trigger a corresponding desire.

I think that the mechanism is simply this: the temperate or courageous agent has been educated, brought up, habituated, etc., in such a way that he is disposed not to form errant non-rational motivations, or only slightly so, when he recognises that virtue demands that he act in a certain way.³⁷ As I see it, it is not, as McDowell presumed, his *conception* of the situation (which we now say aligns with his choice) that *itself* silences errant non-rational motivations from arising, as if the agent's conception of the situation were some kind of 'muffle' that stops those features from making any 'noise'. It is instead that the agent *is so disposed* that *when* he recognises that a requirement of virtue is in play, his non-rational inclinations move into line and (where necessary) support his rational motivations. Indeed, on McDowell's view, Aristotle's virtuous agent seems to have *lost* his distinct non-rational motivations altogether: any errant inclinations are silenced, but we do not hear of any positive inclinations *backing* or *supporting* the agent's choice. But, as we have seen, Aristotle thinks that the non-rational motivations of the (unconflicted) virtuous agent harmonise with his rational motivation and prompt him to act *on all matters (panta)* in the same way as reason (*NE* 1.13.1102b27–28). There is, in this way, a *coinciding* of rational and non-rational motivations in the virtuous agent, rather than a silencing of one by the other.

It seems likely that McDowell would interpret these remarks as implying a 'Humean' reading of Aristotle that he is trying to resist. He writes (after Nagel (1970: 29–30)):

If we credit [the agent] with a suitable desire ... that need be no more than a consequence of the fact that we take his conception of the circumstances to have been

³⁷ Burnyeat's (1980) discussion is the classic account of this process; see also Lawrence (2011).

his reason for acting as he did; the desire need not function as an independent component in the explanation, needed in order to account for the capacity of the cited reason to influence the agent's will. (1978: 16)

But, as should be clear from the last chapter (see §§1–2), I do not think that an account of the moral psychology of the agent in terms of desires is incompatible with a non-Humean account of motivation. On my view, Aristotle thinks in general that it is the contents of cognitive states (ones which reveal objects of desire) that ultimately serve as sources of motivation, not desires themselves. Thus, the way in which a non-rational desire ‘backs’ a choice is that it involves the agent construing the chosen option as one that would (also) be e.g. pleasurable. If this helps motivate the agent, then we can ascribe a desire to him, but that desire is ascribed, not the source of motivation itself.³⁸

What we are now explaining is how it is that an agent can happen to have the right non-rational desires in the first place. In this respect, it is worth noting that we are only able to say that the motivational difference between virtuous agents and enkratic/akratic agents can be accounted for in terms of the *characters* of these agents, if we are employing the broad signification of ‘character’ (in which a virtue of character specifies a state of character), not if we are using the narrow notion (in which the agent’s character aligns with the agent’s choices); for, as we have seen, virtuous and akratic/enkratic agents each form the correct choice. But there must be *some* difference between akratic/enkratic agents, on the one hand, and virtuous agents, on the other, which explains why the former have errant impulses and the latter do not. And presumably this difference is to be found in the education, upbringing, habituation, etc., that have heretofore contributed to making them the people that they are.³⁹ The fact that we cannot pinpoint anything more determinate than this should not be taken to be a defect of the current account. After all, there must be *some* difference that explains why the enkratic agent resists his errant motivations whereas the akratic agent gives into them, even though both share

³⁸ For more detail on this, see my 2011a.

³⁹ Perhaps also inherited features, but such nature/nurture questions lie beyond my current discussion.

(i) the same choice, (ii) the relevant evaluative impressions of the prospective pleasure, *and also* (iii) the same errant motivations. We are no more in need of an explanation of how it is that virtuous agents need not form motivations in response to such evaluative impressions, than we are in need of an explanation as to why akratic agents act on their inclinations whereas enkratic agents resist them.⁴⁰ In both cases, the explanation would presumably appeal to the upbringing, education, habituation, etc., of the agent, as that seems to be all that is left to appeal to. And I see no reason to think that that would not be where the explanation would lie.

Conclusion

The account of virtue (at least for courage and temperance) that I wish to ascribe to Aristotle can be summarised as follows. When a virtuous agent recognises that a situation demands a course of action, that recognition does not itself entail that he is not distressed at the prospect of acting that way (courage) or that he cannot recognise that it would be pleasurable to act in a contrary way (temperance). However, in spite of such impressions, courageous and temperate agents will remain unconflicted, or only be very slightly conflicted: the evaluative impressions will not engage errant motivations in them, or will only do so very slightly. This occurs not because the virtuous agent's conception of the situation 'silences' any errant impulses, but because the virtuous agent's non-rational part harmonises with his rational part. Although there is reason for him to undergo the evaluative impressions (e.g. he is knowingly expecting to lose his life, which is a valuable life, and so should feel distress at this prospect, or else be excessively *fearless*), these do not trigger significant errant inclinations in him, and in order for the virtuous agent to act effectively, virtue *requires* that they do not, or do so only very slightly. The harmony

⁴⁰ Indeed, Charles himself seems to need to provide us with a 'mechanism' that explains why the courageous agent acts '*without* pain overall, having successfully overcome his fear' (1984: 173, my emphasis), whereas his enkratic equivalent resists because it is noble, 'but does so *with* pain overall, because he has not successfully overcome his fear' (1984: 173, my emphasis). Presumably this would appeal to the same sorts of feature (education, upbringing, habituation, etc.) I have mentioned.

in question, or very near harmony, is presumably brought about by the agent's upbringing, education, habituation, etc.

This conception of virtue will no doubt make it so that 'it is no easy task to be good' but, as Aristotle notes, 'that is why goodness is both rare and laudable and noble' (1109a24, 29–30).

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